WDL

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

No. 8

The Zane Grey Novel

"NEVADA"

MAGAZINE ABRIDGMENT

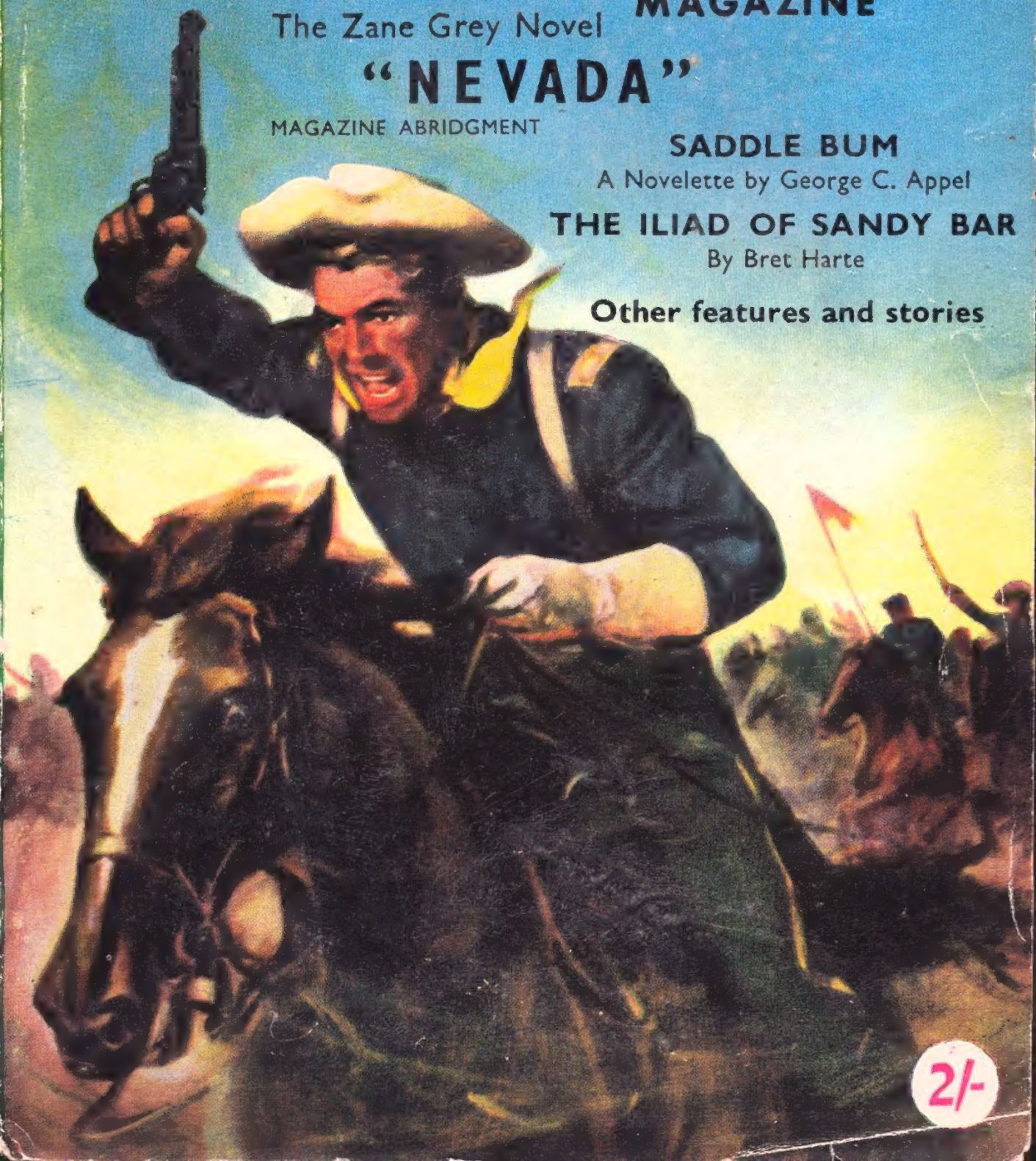
SADDLE BUM

A Novelette by George C. Appel

THE ILIAD OF SANDY BAR

By Bret Harte

Other features and stories



2/-

"She's been sittin' on your lap–that won't go with me!"

"Nevada," Chap. 3

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

VOL. 1, NO. 8

NOVEL (magazine abridgment)

"NEVADA" — *Zane Grey* — 3

SHORT STORIES

THE ILIAD OF SANDY BAR—*A Western Classic* — *Bret Harte* — 105

THE SHERIFF AND THE SLAVERS — *John E. Kelly* — 113

FAIR TRADE — *Bill Gulick* — 136

NOVELETTE

SADDLE BUM — *George C. Appell* — 146

FACT FEATURE

LONG RIDER LAUREATE — *W. H. Hutchinson* — 127

VERSE

THE CIMARRON — *Clarence Edward Flynn* — 126

PICTORIAL FEATURE

THE COLT PEACEMAKER — *Randy Steffen* — Inside back cover

DEPARTMENTS

REDSKIN WRITING—*A Western Quiz* — 104

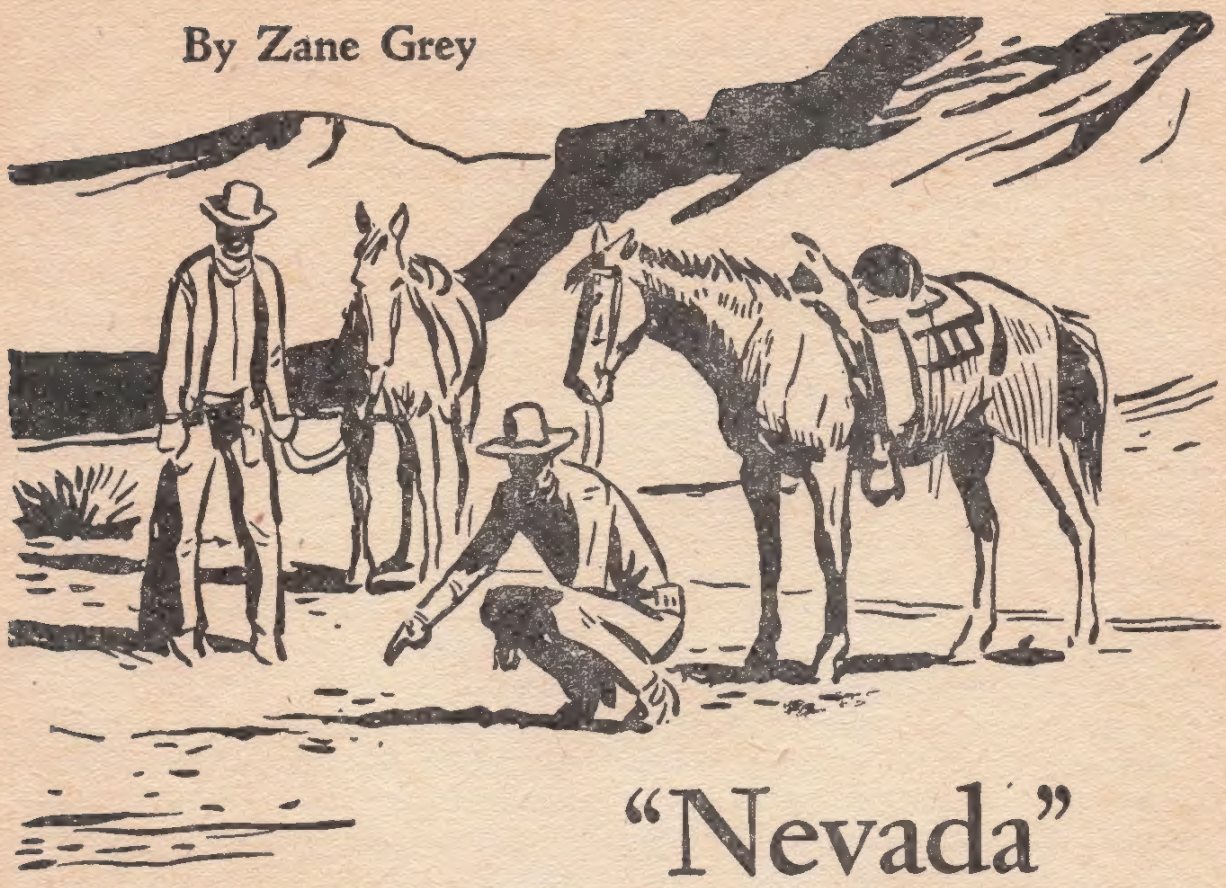
FREE-FOR-ALL—*The Editors Speak* — 159

Published in the United Kingdom by World Distributors (Manchester) Ltd., by arrangement with Western Printing & Lithographing Corporation, Racine, Wisconsin, U.S.A., authorized Zane Grey Western Magazine Publishers. Printed in Great Britain at the Philips Park Press by C. Nicholls & Company Ltd.

This Month's Magazine Abridgment

Jim Lacy returns to Lineville with the hope that here he can spend a few quiet months in recovering from the emotion-wracking events of the past ones. In this sleepy little village, he feels, he can gradually rid mind and soul of the onus of his hard-won but unpalatable identity as "Nevada", gunhawk extraordinary. Time will also, he hopes, slowly erase the clinging memory of sweet-faced Hettie Ide, who has known him only by the nickname which he so despises and who, he fears, was so close to falling in love with him. For, in Jim Lacy's scheme of things, no decent girl should get interested, however innocently, in a man with an outlaw past. It is that same stern personal code which leads him to avenge the death of another girl caught in the toils of Lineville's unsavoury little underworld—after which Jim Lacy once again disappears. Meantime, Ben Ide, his former partner, follows a restless, fruitless quest in search of "Nevada", taking with him his wife and child and the sister who, like Ben, can never forget the man who befriended them and sacrificed so much for them. Not until Ben's new ranch, in the shadow of the Mogollons, is about to come apart at the seams from the unceasing rangeland thieves does a saviour comparable to their "Nevada" of old appear on the scene. Then a rider known as "Texas Jack" proves with roaring guns that names are of little importance in the rough-hewn drama of Western life. "Nevada" is one of Zane Grey's finest and most appealing stories.

By Zane Grey



"Nevada"

CHAPTER ONE

Solitude

AS HIS goaded horse plunged into the road, Nevada looked back over his shoulder. The lane he had plowed through the crowd let him see back into the circle where the three men lay prostrate. The blue smoke from his gun was rising slowly. Ben Ide's face shone white and convulsed in the sunlight.

"So long, pard!" yelled Nevada hoarsely, and stood in his stirrups to wave his sombrero high. That, he thought, was farewell forever to this friend who had saved him, whom he loved better than a brother.

Then Nevada faced the yellow road down which his horse was racing. There was something familiar and mocking about this precipitate flight on a swift horse, headed for the dark mountains. How often had he felt the wind sting his face on a run for his life! But it was not fear now, nor love of life, that made him a fugitive.

The last gate of the ranch was open, and Nevada flashed through it to go flying down the trail along the shore of the lake. The green water blurred on one side of him and the gray sage on the other. There was no need now for this breakneck ride. To be sure, the officers of the law would eventually get on his track, as they had been for years; but thought of them scarcely lingered a moment in his consciousness.

Five miles brought horse and rider far around to the other side of the lake. Here the trail wound down upon

Copyright, 1926, 1927, by Cromwell Publishing Co.; copyright, 1928, by Zane Grey.
Magazine abridgment by arrangement with The Hawley Publications, Inc.

the soft sand and along the edge of the lake, where the midday sun had thawed the ice. Nevada had a break in his strained mood. He saw the deep hoof tracks of horses along the shore, and the long cuts and scars on the ice, where he and Ben and the freed outlaws had run that grand wild stallion, California Red, to his last plunge and fall. Nevada could not help but thrill as he remembered the strange lucky catch of the wild horse Ben Ide loved so well. What a trick for fortune to play! How mad Ben had been —to bargain with the rustlers they had captured—to trade their freedom for the aid they gave in running down the red stallion! Yet mad as that act had been, Nevada could only love Ben the more. Ben was the true wild-horse hunter.

Nevada reached the bluff where Forlorn River lost itself in the lake, and climbed the sloping trail to the cabin where he and Ben had lived in lonely happiness. Ben, the outcast son of a rich rancher of Tule Lake—and he, the wandering, fugitive, crippled gunman, whom Ben had taken in with only one question.

"Where you from?" Ben had asked.

"Nevada," had been the reply. And that had been the only name by which Ben had ever known him.

It was all over now. Nevada dismounted from his wet and heaving horse. "Wal, Baldy," he said, throwing the bridle, "reckon the runnin's aboot over." And he sank heavily upon the porch step, pushed his sombrero back to run a hand through his wet hair, smoothing it away from his heated brow. He gazed across the lake toward the cabins and barns of the Blaine ranch. With the wrench which shook him then, the last of that icy nausea released its cramping hold and yielded to the softening human element in Nevada.

Reckon I cain't set heah mopin' like an owl, soliloquized Nevada, getting up. *Shore, the thing's done. An' I wouldn't have it otherwise . . . Dear old Ben! He was the only pard I ever had, except a hoss or two. Wal, Ben's name is cleared now—thank God. Old Amos Ide knows the truth now an' he'll have to beg forgiveness of Ben. Hart Blaine will know, too, an' he'll have to come round to the boy. They'll all have to crawl for callin' Ben a rustler. Ben will marry Ina now—an' he'll be rich. He's got California Red, too, an' he'll be happy.*

From the lake Nevada gazed away across Forlorn River, over the gray sage hills, over the black ranges toward the back country, the wilderness whence he had come and to which he must return. To the hard life, the scant fare, the sordid intimacy of crooked men and women, to the border of Nevada, where he had a bad name, where he could never sleep in safety, or wear a glove on his gun hand! But at that moment Nevada had not one regret. He had paid his debt to his friend. He had saved Ben from prison, cleared his name of infamy, given him back to Ina Blaine, and killed his enemies.

Nevada went into the cabin. He had expected to find it as always, clean and neat and comfortable. The room, however, was in rude disorder. It had been ransacked by violent hands. The pseudo-sheriffs, who had come at the beck of Less Setter to arrest Ben, had not hesitated to stoop to thievery.

Nevada gazed ponderingly around on this disorder.

"Wal," he muttered grimly, "I reckon Less Setter won't be rammin' around heah any more—or any other place short of hell!"

With that remark Nevada strode out

and down the path to the corrals. There were horses in at the watering-trough. He caught one, and securing pack saddle and packs, he returned to the cabin. Here he hurriedly gathered his belongings. Then mounting his horse he drove the pack animal ahead of him, and rode down to the shallow ford across Forlorn River.

Shore, Ben will always keep this ranch as we had it, he mused. *An' he'll come heah often.*

Hot tears fell from Nevada's eyes, the first he had shed since his orphaned boyhood, so dim and far away. But as he rode up the river his tears dried, and from a ridge top a mile or more up the lonely river, Nevada gazed back at the cabin for the last time. Something surer than his intelligence told him that he would never see it again. It opened a door into his mind, which let in the fact he had so stubbornly resisted—that when he bade good-by to the little cabin it was not only good-by to it and to his friend, but to the most precious of all that had ever entered his life—Hettie Ide.

Nevada made that farewell, and then rode on. Sunset brought him to an awareness of the proximity of night; and riding through a thicket of slender oaks, which crossed a narrow valley, he halted in a grassy dell to make his camp. In spite of his restlessness of spirit he was hungry and ate heartily. By the time his few camp chores were done, night had fallen, pitch black, without any stars.

Nevada sat cross-legged, like an Indian, before his campfire. It was small, but warm. He dreaded to go to the bed he had made, for he would fall asleep at once, then awake during the night, to lie in the loneliness and stillness. The longer he stayed awake the shorter that vigil in the after hours of the night. Besides, the campfire was a companion. It glowed and sparkled.

The moment came when Hettie Ide's face appeared clearly in the gold and red embers. It shone there, her youthful face crowned by fair hair, with its earnest gray eyes and firm sweet lips.

Strange and terrible to recall—Nevada had kissed those sweet lips and had been kissed by them! That face had lain upon his breast and the fair hair had caressed his cheek. They would haunt him now, always, down the trails of the future, shining from every campfire.

"Hettie—Hettie," he whispered, brokenly, "you're only a kid an' shore you'll forget. I'm glad Ben never knew aboot us. It'll all come out now after my gunplay of today. An' you an' Ben will know I am Jim Lacy! Oh, if only I could have kept it secret, so you'd never have known I was bad! An', oh—there'll never be anyone to tell you I cain't be bad no more!"

Thus Nevada mourned to himself. It was an hour when Nevada's love mounted to the greatness of sacrifice, when he cast forever from him any hope of possession, when he realized all that remained were the glory and the dream, and the changed soul which must be true to the girl who had loved him and believed in him.

He had never, until now, realized the significance of that moment when Hettie and he, without knowing how it had come to pass, found themselves in each other's arms. What might have been! But that, too, had only been a dream. Still, Nevada knew he had dreamed it, believed in it, surrendered to it. And some day he might have

buried the past, even his name, and grasped the happiness Hettie's arms had promised. But in hiding his real name, in living this character Nevada, could he have been true to the soul Ben and Hettie had uplifted in him? Nevada realized that he could no longer have lived a lie. And though he would not have cared so much about Ben, he had not wanted Hettie to learn that he had been Jim Lacy, notorious from Lineville across the desert wastes of Nevada clear to Tombstone.

"Reckon it's better so," muttered Nevada to the listening campfire. "If only Hettie never learns aboot the real me!"

Nevada bowed his bare head, and a hard sob racked him.

"Shore—it's losin' her—that kills me!" he ground out between his teeth. "I cain't—bear it."

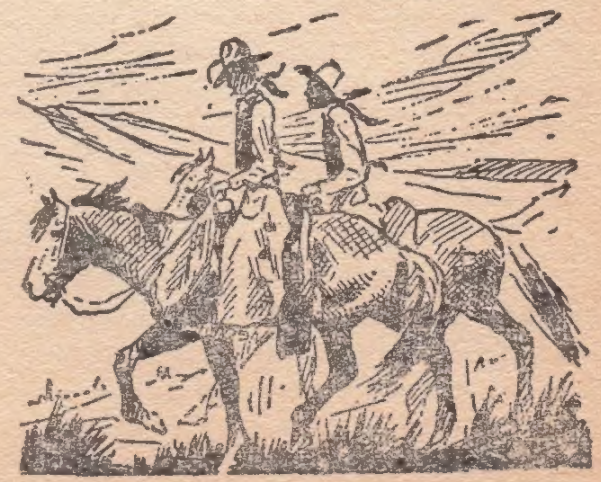
When he crawled into his blankets at midnight it was only because the conflict within him had exhausted his strength. Sleep mercifully brought him oblivion. But with the cold dawn his ordeal returned. The agony was that he could not be happy without Hettie Ide's love—without sight of her, without her smile, her touch. He wanted to seek some hidden covert, like a crippled animal, and die. He wanted to plunge into the old raw life of the border, dealing death and meeting death among those lawless men who had ruined him.

But he could not make an end to it all, in any way. The infernal paradox was that in thought of Ben's happiness, which he had made, there was an ecstasy as great as the agony of his own loss. Furthermore, Hettie's love, her embraces, her faith had lifted him to some incredible height and fettered him there, forever to fight for the something she had created in himself. He owed himself a debt greater than that which he had owed Ben. Hettie had made him believe in himself—in that new-born self which seemed now so all-compelling and so inscrutable.

"Baldy, I've shore got a fight on my hands," he said to his horse, as he threw on the saddle. "We've got to hit the back trails. We've got to eat an' sleep an' find some place where it's safe to hide. Maybe, after a long while, we can cross over the desert to Arizona an' find honest work."

Nevada traveled far that day, winding along the cattle trails up the valleys and over the passes. He began to get into high country, into the cedars and pinons. He avoided the few cattle ranches which nestled in the larger grass valleys.

On the following day he climbed the divide that separated the sage and forest country from the desert beyond. From a grassy saddle, where autumn wild flowers still bloomed brightly, he gazed down the long uneven slope of the range, to the canyoned and cedared strip of California, and on to the border of Nevada, bleak, wild, and magnificent. The gray-and-yellow desert



stretched away illimitably. with vast expanse of hazy levels and endless barren ranges. The prospect in some sense resembled Nevada's future as he imagined it.

Reckon I'll hide out awhile in some canyon, he reflected.

Then he began the descent from the divide, and soon the great hollow and the upheaval of land beyond were lost to his sight. The trail zigzagged down and up, under the brushy banks, through defiles of weathered rock, on and on down out of the heights.

Before Nevada reached the end of that long mountain slope he heard the dreamy hum of a tumbling stream, and turning off the trail he picked his way to the rim of a shallow canyon, whence had come the sound of falling water. He walked, leading his horses for a mile or more before he found a break in the canyon wall where he could get down.

Here indeed was a lonely retreat. Grass and wood were abundant, and tracks of deer and other game assured him he could kill meat. A narrow sheltered reach of the canyon, where the cottonwood trees still were green and gold and the grass grew rich along the stream, appeared a most desirable place to camp.

So he unpacked his horses, leisurely and ponderingly, as if time were naught, and set about making a habitation in the wilds.

Nevada did not count the days or nights. These passed as in a dream. He roamed up and down the canyon with his rifle, though he used it only when he needed meat. He spent hours sitting in sunny spots, absorbed in memory. Days passed into weeks. The cottonwoods shed their leaves to spread a golden carpet underneath. The nights grew cold and the wind moaned in the trees.

The time came when solitude seemed no longer endurable. Nevada knew that if he lingered there he would go mad. For there encroached upon his dream of Hettie Ide and Ben, and that one short beautiful and ennobling period of his life, a strange dark mood in which the men he had killed came back to him. Nevada had experienced this before. The only cure was drink, work, action, a mingling with humankind, the sound of voices.

"Reckon it's aboot time for me to declare myself," he muttered. "I cain't lie to myself, any more than I could to Hettie. I've changed. Shore I don't know myself. An' this damned life I face staggers me. What am I goin' to do? I say find honest work somewhere far off. Arizona, perhaps, where I'd be least known. That's what Hettie would expect of me. She'd have faith I'd do it. But for her sake an' Ben's, never mindin' my own, I've got to hole up till that last gun-throwin' of mine is forgotten. If I were found an' recognized as Jim Lacy it'd be bad. An' if anyone did, it'd throw the light on some things I'd rather die than have Hettie Ide know."

Chapter Two

"*Lineville Shore Looks Daid.*"

IT WAS a cold, bleak November day when Nevada rode into Lineville. Columns of blue wood smoke curled from the shacks and huts and houses of the straggling hamlet.

Part of these habitations, those on one

side of the road, lay in California, and those on the other belonged to Nevada.

Lineville had been a mining town of some pretensions during the early days of the gold rush. Deserted and weathered shacks were mute reminders of more populous times. High on the bleak drab foothill stood the ruins of an ore mill. Gold was still to be mined in the rugged hills, though only in scant quantity. When Nevada had last been there it was possible to find a few honest men and women, but the percentage in the three hundred population was small.

Nevada halted before a gray cabin set well back in a large plot of ground just inside the limits of the town. Corrals and sheds stood farther back at the foot of the rocky slope. Briers and brush surounded a garden. Nevada remembered the rudely painted sign that had been nailed slantwise on the gatepost. *Lodgings.*

Dismounting, Nevada left his horses and entered, to go round to the back of the cabin. He hesitated a moment, then knocked. The door was opened by a buxom matron, with ruddy face, big frank eyes, and hair beginning to turn gray.

"Howdy, Mrs. Wood!" he greeted her.

The woman stared, then burst out, "Well, for goodness' sake, if it ain't Jim Lacy!"

"I reckon. Are you goin' to ask me in? I'm aboot froze."

"Jim, you know you never had to ask to come in my house," she replied, and drew him into a cozy little kitchen.

"Thanks. I'm glad to hear that. Shore seems like home to me. I've been layin' out in the cold an' starvin' for a long time."

"Son, you look it," she returned, nodding her head disapprovingly at him. "Jim, you used to be a handsome lad. How lanky you are! What've you been up to?"

"Wal, Mrs. Wood," he drawled coolly, "shore you've heard aboot me lately?"

"Nary a word, Jim."

"No? Wal, I am surprised, an' glad, too," replied Nevada, smiling his relief. "Reckon you couldn't give me a job? Helpin' around, like I used to, for my board."

"Jim, I jest could, an' I will," she declared.

"Now, I'm doggone lucky, Mrs. Wood."

"Humph! I don't know about that, Jim. Comin' back to Lineville can't be lucky. Ah, boy, I'd hoped if you was alive you'd turned over a new leaf."

"It was good of you to think of me kind like that," he said. "I'll go out an' look after my pack an' horses."

"Fetch your pack right in. An' I'll not forget you're starved."

Nevada went out thoughtfully, and slowly led his horses out to the barn. There, while he unpacked, his mind dwelt on the singular effect that Mrs. Wood's words had upon him. This kindly woman had hoped he would never return. He took so long about caring for his horses and unpacking that presently Mrs. Wood called him. Then shouldering his bedroll and carrying a small pack, he returned to the kitchen. She had a hot meal prepared. Nevada ate until he was ashamed of himself.

"Shore I know what to call myself. But it tasted so good."

"Ahuh. Well, Jim, you take some hot water an' shave your woolly face," she returned. "You can have the end room, right off the hall."

Nevada carried his pack into the room designated, then returned for the hot water, soap, and towel. When an hour later he strode into the kitchen to confront Mrs. Wood, she studied him with eyes as speculative as kind.

"Jim, I notice your gun has the same old swing, low down. Now that's queer, ain't it?" she said ironically.

"Wal, it shore feels queer," he responded. "For, honest, I haven't packed it at all for a long time."

"An' you haven't been lookin' at red liquor, either?"

"Reckon not."

"An' you haven't been lookin' at women, either?"

"Gosh! no. I always was scared of them," he laughed easily. But he could not deceive her.

"Boy, somethin' has happened to you," she declared seriously. "You're older. Jim, I once saw Billy the Kid in New Mexico. You used to look like him, not in face or body or walk, but jest in some way, some *look* I can't describe. But now it's gone."

"Ahuh. Wal, I don't know whether or not you're complimentin' me," drawled Nevada. "Billy the Kid was a pretty wild *hombre*, wasn't he?"

"Humph! You'd have thought so if you'd gone through that Lincoln County cattle war with me an' my husband. They killed three hundred men, and my Jack was one of them . . . Yes, Jim, you had the look of Billy, an' if you'd kept on you'd been another like him. But somethin' has happened to you. I ain't inquisitive, but have you lost your nerve?"

"Shore, that's it, Mrs. Wood. I've no more nerve than a chicken," drawled Nevada, with all his old easy coolness.

"Shoo!" she said. "Jim Lacy, you left here a boy an' you've come back a man. Wonder what Lize Teller will think of you now. She was moony about you, the hussy!"

"Lize Teller. Is she heah?"

"She about bosses Lineville, Jim. She doesn't live with my humble self any more, but hangs out at the Gold Mine."

Nevada found a seat on a low bench between the stove and the corner, a place that had been a favorite with him, and settled himself for a talk. This woman held an unique position in the little border hamlet, in that she possessed the confidence of gamblers, miners, rustlers, everybody.

"Lize married yet?" began Nevada casually.

"No, indeed, an' she never will be now," replied Mrs. Wood forcibly. "She had her chance, a decent cattleman named Holder, from Eureka. Reckon he knew he was buyin' stolen cattle. But for all that he was a mighty fine sort for Lineville. Much too good for that black-eyed wench. She was taken with him, too. Then Cash Burridge rode in one day—after a long absence. Cash had been in somethin' big, south somewhere. An' he come back to lie low an' gamble. He had plenty of money, as usual. Lost it, as usual. Lize was clerk at the Gold Mine. She got thick with Cash. He an' Holder had a mix-up over the girl, an' that settled her. She went from bad to worse. You'll see."

"Cash Burridge back," rejoined Nevada somberly, and he dropped his head to hide the sudden fire in his eyes. "Reckon I'd plumb forgot Cash."

"Ha! Ha! Yes, you did, Jim Lacy. No one would ever forget Cash, much less you. Dear me, I hope you an' he don't meet again."

"Wal, of course we'll meet. I cain't

hang round your kitchen all the while, much as I like it."

"Jim, I didn't mean meet him on the street, or in the store. You know what I meant."

"Don't worry, Mother Wood. Reckon Cash an' I won't clash. Because I'm not lookin' for trouble."

"You never did, my boy. But you never run from it. An' you know Cash Burridge. He's bad medicine sober, an' hell when he's drunk."

"Ahuh, I reckon, now you remind me. Has Cash been up to his old tricks lately?"

"I haven't heard much, Jim," she returned thoughtfully. "Mostly just gossip. No truth in it, likely."

Nevada knew it would do no good to press her further in this direction, which reticence was proof that Cash Burridge had been adding to his reputation one way or another. Nevada had curious reaction—a scorn for his own strange, vague eagerness to know. A slow heat ran along his veins.

"Lineville shore looks daid," he said tentatively.

"It *is* dead, Jim. But you know it's comin' on winter. An' this Lineville outfit is like a lot of groundhogs. They hole-up when the snow flies. There's more travel along the road than ever before. Three stages a week now, an' lots of people stop here for a night. I get a good many."

"Travel on the road? What you mean, Mother Wood?"

"Jim, where have you been for so long?" she asked curiously. "Sure you must have been buried somewhere. There's a new minin' town—Salisbar. An' travel from north has been comin' through here, in spite of the awful road."

"Salisbar? Never heard aboot it. An' stagecoaches—goin' through Lineville now! Well—by golly!"

"Jim, there's been only a couple of holdups. None of this outfit, though. We hear the stage line will stop runnin' soon, till spring."

"You mentioned aboot a cattleman named Holder buyin' heah. Shore he's not the only one?"

"No. But cattle deals have been low this summer. Last bunch of cattle come over in June."

"Wal, Lineville is daid, shore enough!"

"Jim, that sort of thing has got to stop sometime, even if it is only a lot of two-bit rustlin'."

"Two-bit? Ha! Ha!"

"Jim, I've seen thousands of longhorns rustled in my day."

"Ahuh! Reckon you have," responded Nevada. "Shore you never took me for a rustler, did you, Mother?"

"Goodness, no! You was only a gun-packin' kid, run off the ranges. But, Jim, you'll fall into it some day, sure as shootin'. You'll be in bad company at the wrong time. Now I'm from Texas an' I always loved a good clean hard-shootin' gunman, like Jack was. There wasn't nothin' crooked about Jack for years an' years. But he fell into it. An' so will you, Jim. I want you to go so far away from Lineville that you can't never come back."

'I'll go in the spring. Shore I'm not hankerin' for the grub-line ride these next few months."

"Fine. That's a promise, my boy. I'll not let you forget it. An' meanwhile it'll be jest as well for you to be snug an' hid right here. Till spring, huh?"

"Mother Wood, you said you wasn't inquisitive," laughed Nevada, parrying her question. Then he grew serious. "When was Hall heah last?"

"In June, with the last cattle that come over the divide. An', Jim, the right queer fact is he's never been back."

"Wal, maybe he has shook the dust of Lineville. He rode in heah sudden, so I was told. An' why not ride off that way? An' that high-flyin' Less Setter from the Snake River country. Did he ever come again?"

"No. That time you clashed with Setter was the only time he ever hit Lineville. No wonder! They said you'd kill him if he did. I remember, Jim, how that night after the row you talked a lot. It was the drink. You'd had trouble with Setter before you come to these parts. I never told it, but I remember."

"Wal, Mother, I came from the Snake River country, too," replied Nevada with a slow dark smile.

"It was said here that Less Setter was too big a man to fiddle around Lineville," returned the woman, passing by Nevada's cryptic remark. "Hall said Setter had many brandin' irons in the fire. His game, though, was to wheedle rich cattlemen an' ranchers into speculations. He was a cunnin' swindler, low-down enough for any deal. An' he had a weakness for women. He tried to take Lize Teller away with him."

"Wal, you don't say!" ejaculated Nevada, trying to affect surprise that was impossible for him to feel. Again he casually averted his face to hide his eyes. Less Setter would never have a weakness for women again. He would never weave his evil machinations around Ben and Hettie Ide, or anyone else, for he and two of his arch conspirators had laid dead there in the courtyard before Hart Blaine's cabins. Dead by Nevada's hand! That was the deed that had saved Ben Ide, and Hettie, too. It seemed long past, yet how vivid the memory!

"Lineville has had its day," the woman was saying. "Setter saw that, if he ever had any idea of operatin' here. Hall saw it, too, for he's never come back. Cash Burridge knows it. He has been away to the south—Arizona somewhere—lookin' up a place where outside travel hasn't struck. He'll leave next spring, an' he'll not go alone. Then decent people won't be afraid to walk down to the store."

"Good luck for Lineville, but bad for Arizona somewhere," returned Nevada dryly. "Shore, I feel sorry for the ranchers over there."

"Humph! I don't know. There are wilder outfits in Arizona than this country ever saw," rejoined the woman contemptuously. "Cash Burridge isn't the caliber to last long in Arizona. Waters an' Blink Miller are tough nuts to crack, I'll admit. I suppose Hardy Rue will trail after Burridge, an' of course that loud-mouthed Link Cawthorne. But there's only one of the whole Lineville outfit that could ever last in Arizona. An' you know who he is, Jim Lacy."

"Wal, now, Mother, I shore haven't the least idee."

"Go 'long with you," she replied, almost with affection. "But, Jim, I'd rather think of you gettin' away from this life than lastin' out the whole crew. I've heard my husband say that gunmen get a mind disease. The gunman is obsessed to kill. Isn't that terrible? But it was so in Texas in the old frontier days there."

"It shore is terrible," responded Nevada gloomily. "I can understand a man learnin' to throw a gun quick for self-defense. Shore that was my own

excuse. But for the sake of killin'! Reckon I don't know what to call that."

Later when Nevada went into his little room he performed an act almost unconsciously. The act of drawing his gun! There it was, as if by magic, level, low down in his clutching hand. Sight of it so gave Nevada a grim surprise. Why had he done that? What was it significant of? He sheathed the long blue gun.

"Reckon Mrs. Wood's talk aboot Cawthorne an' the rest of that outfit accounts for me throwin' my gun," he muttered to himself. "Funny—No—not so damn funny, after all."

He had returned to an environment where proficiency with a gun was the law. Self-preservation was the only law among those lawless men with whom misfortune had thrown him. He must mingle with them as in the past, though it seemed his whole nature had changed. And mingling with these outlaws was never free from risk. There were always newcomers, always drunken ruffians, always some would-be killer like Cawthorne, who yearned for fame among his evil kind. There must now always be the chance of some friend or ally of Setter, who would draw on him at sight. Lastly, owing to the reputation he had attained and hated, there was always the possibility of meeting such a gunman as Mrs. Wood had spoken of—that strange product of frontier life, the victim of his own blood lust, who would want to kill him solely because of his reputation.

Reckon I'd better forget my dreamin' heah, he soliloquized. *An' when I'm out be like I used to be. Shore it goes against the grain. I'm two men in one —Nevada an' Jim Lacy. Reckon Jim better take a hunch.*

Whereupon he deliberately set about ascertaining just how much of his old incomparable swiftness on the draw remained with him after the long lack of exercise.

"Slower'n molasses, as Ben used to say aboot me," he muttered. "But I've the feel, an' I can get it all back."

The leather holster on his belt was hard and stiff. He oiled it and worked it soft with strong hands. The little room began to grow dark as the short afternoon waned.

It was still daylight, however, when Nevada went out, to walk leisurely down the road into town. He came at length to the narrow block where there were a few horses and vehicles along the hitching-rails, and people passing to and fro. There were several stores and shops, a saloon, and a restaurant, that appeared precisely as they had always been.

Nevada dropped into a couple of places, where he renewed acquaintance with men who were glad to see him; and then he crossed to the other side of the wide street and went down to the Gold Mine. The front of the wide two-story structure appeared quite plain and businesslike. It looked like a respectable hotel. But the Gold Mine was a tavern for the outlaw elect, a gambling-hell and a drinking-dive that could not have been equaled short of the Mexican border.

Nevada turned the corner to take the side entrance, which led into the long dingily lighted barroom. A half-dozen men stood drinking and talking at the bar. They noted Nevada's entrance, but did not recognize him, nor did he them. A wide portal, with curtain of strung beads, opened into a larger room, which was almost sumptuously furnished. The red hangings

were new to Nevada, and some of the furniture. He remembered the gaudy and obscene pictures on the wall, and the card and roulette tables, and particularly the large open fireplace. Six men sat around one table, and of those whose faces were visible to Nevada he recognized only one, that of a gambler called Ace Black.

Nevada took the seat on the far side of the fire, where he could see both entrances to the large room. At the moment there was something akin to bitter revolt at the fact of his presence there. No logical reason existed for his visiting the Gold Mine. He would never drink again; he had but little money to gamble with, even had he been so inclined; he rather felt repugnance at the thought of seeing Lize Teller, or any other girl likely to come in. But something restless and keen within him accounted for his desire to meet old acquaintances there. Could it be a rebirth of old recklessness? He would have to fight that as something untrue to Hettie Ide. And as a wave of sweet and bitter emotion went over him, a musical rattling of the beaded-curtain door attracted his attention.

A girl entered. She had a pale face, and very large black eyes that seemed to blaze at Nevada.

Chapter Three

"*Cat!*"

She came slowly toward him, with the undulating movement of her lissome form that he remembered even better than her tragic face. Life had evidently been harsher than ever to Lize Teller.

Nevada rose and, doffing his sombrero, shook hands with her.

"Jim Lacy!" she ejaculated.

"Howdy, Lize!" drawled Nevada. "Reckon you're sort of surprised to see me heah."

"Surprised? Yes. I thought you had more sense. Sit down, Jim." As he complied she seated herself on the arm of his chair and leaned close. "I've been looking for you all afternoon. Lorenzo saw you ride in and stop at Mrs. Wood's."

"Ahuh! Wal, no wonder you wasn't surprised."

"But I am, Jim. Surprised at your nerve and more surprised at the look of you. What's happened? you've improved so I don't know you."

She leaned against him with the old coquetry that was a part of her and which Nevada had once found pleasing, though he had never encouraged it.

"Thanks, Lize. Wal, there was shore room for improvement. Nothin' much happened, except I've been workin' an' I quit the bottle."

"That's a lot, Jim, and I'm downright glad. I'll fall in love with you all over again."

"Please don't, Lize," he laughed. "I've quit throwin' guns, too. An' I reckon it'd be unhealthy for me, if you did."

"Probably will be, boy. You sure have me guessing," she replied, and she smoothed his hair and his scarf, while she gazed at him with deep, burning, inquisitive eyes. "But don't try to lie to me about your gun tricks, sonny. You forget I'm the only one around Lineville who had you figured."

"Lize, I don't know as I remember that."

"Jim, you forget easily," she rejoined,

with a touch of bitterness. "But God knows there was no reason for you to remember *me*. It was natural for me to miss you. For you were the only decent man I knew. But you treated me like you were a brother. And that made me hate you."

"Lize, you didn't hate me. That was temper. Maybe you got a little miffed because you couldn't make a fool of me like you did the others. Shore I cain't believe you'd be mean enough to hate me."

"Jim, you don't know women," she replied bitterly. "I can do anything—Where'd you say you'd been—workin'—all this long while?"

"Wal, now, Lize, I don't recollect sayin'," he drawled. "Shore never liked to talk aboot myself. What have you been doin'?"

"Me! Aw, hell! Can't you see? If I live another year I'll be in the street. I hate this damned life, Jim. But what can I do? Of course Mrs. Wood told you all she knew about me."

"Wal, she told me—some," replied Nevada hesitatingly. "Wish I'd been heah when you made such a darn fool of yourself."

"I wish to God you had," she flashed, with terrible passion. "You'd have shot Cash Burridge. He double-crossed me, Jim. Oh, I know I'm no good, but I'm honest. Cash actually made me believe *he* would marry me. I told Holder I was not a good girl. He seemed willing to take me, anyhow. But Cash told him a lot of vile lies about me, and it fell through. I'm working here at the Gold Mine now—everything from bookkeeper to bartender."

"Lize, I heah you're thick with Link Cawthorne."

"Bah! You can call it thick, if you like, but I call it thin. He's a jealous tight-fisted brag, mean as a coyote. He thinks he owns me."

"Wal, Lize, wouldn't it be interestin' for me right now—if Link happened in?" drawled Nevada.

"Ha! Ha! More so for me, Jim," she trilled. "I'll give him something to be jealous about. But Link could never be interesting to you. He's a bluff."

"All the same, Lize, if you'll excuse me I'll stand up an' let you have the chair," replied Nevada coolly, as he extricated himself and arose.

She swore her amazement. "What the devil's come over you, Jim Lacy? Why, two years ago, if Link Cawthorne had come roaring in here with two guns you'd have laughed and turned your back."

"Two years ago! Lize, I've learned a lot in that long time."

With sudden lowering of voice she queried sharply, "Jim, did you kill Less Setter?"

Nevada had braced himself for anything from this girl, so he did not betray himself.

"Setter! Is he daid?"

"Yes, he's daid," she replied, flippantly mimicking his accent. "And a damn good thing! Jim Lacy, I lay that to you."

"Wal, Lize, I cain't stop the wanderin's of your mind, but you're shore takin' a lot upon yourself," he returned coldly.

She caught his hand. "Jim, I didn't mean to offend. I remember you were queer about—you know—when you'd had some gunplay."

"Ahuh? Wal, there's no offense. Reckon I'm sort of hurt that you accuse me."

"Jim, I notice you don't *deny* it," she retorted, with her brilliant searching eyes on him. "But listen. Only a few

people in Lineville have heard Setter is dead. I heard it from a chance traveler. Setter had been shot by a wild-horse hunter over in California. That was all. That reminded me of something else. Last summer Steve Elkins saw you in a saloon in Hammell. So when I remembered that, I remembered you had a grudge on Setter, also that you loved wild-horse hunting, and I put two and two together and figured *you* had done for Setter. But I've never mentioned my suspicions to anyone. I don't believe anyone here has connected you with that little gunplay.

"Cash Burridge was glad enough to hear the news, you can bet. He had been sent to Arizona by Setter on some deal only the two of them were in. Cash had a roll of money big enough to stop up a stovepipe. He went to Arizona. And he never saw Setter again. He told me so. Well, he didn't tell me how he'd benefited by Setter's death. I figured that, too."

"Lize, you're shore a clever girl," said Nevada admiringly. "But shore I'd rather you didn't give me credit for removin' so many undesirable citizens from the world."

"Have it your own way, Jim," she returned, with a sly laugh. "And now for what I was coming to. Did you ever hear of Hardy Rue?"

"Wal, yes. Never saw the man, though."

"He wasn't here during your time. But he's here now, and he's the man for you to watch. I think he was Setter's right hand and came to Lineville to check up on Cash Burridge. They don't get along. I'd say Rue is a dangerous man. Deep sort of chap, seldom talks, never drinks, hates women, and has an eye like a hawk. He's—hello! Somebody calling me. I'll see you later. You bet I want to be around when Link strolls in."

She ran from the room, leaving Nevada with plenty to think about. Yet he was considerably relieved that his name had not been openly used in connection with Setter's death.

Gradually the gaming-tables filled up. More than one keen-eyed player gave Nevada a curt nod of recognition. He was approached presently by two newcomers, one of whom, a little man, no longer young, with a face like that of a weasel, and eyes that had a trick of opening and shutting quickly, he recognized as Blink Miller.

"Howdy, Blink!" he replied to the other's greeting.

"You're lookin' fust-rate, Lacy" replied Miller. "Shake hands with my friend, Hardy Rue."

Nevada found himself under the surveillance of a quiet, penetrating gray gaze. This man Rue was matured, a stalwart type of miner rather than the rangy rider. He had a hard lined face, with prominent chin and set thin lips.

"Care to drink with me, Lacy?" he inquired.

"No, thanks," replied Nevada. "Reckon I'm not fixed to buy drinks, so I'm not acceptin' any."

"Ain't you grown awful particular since you've been away so long?" queried Miller with a smile.

"Wal, Blink, come to think aboot it, I have," drawled Nevada with all his old and cool carelessness. "Particular aboot not owin' anybody favors an' particular aboot who I drink with."

Miller blinked at Nevada. "Reckon that's particular nice of you, Lacy. Nobody wants to buy drinks for a feller who's broke."

Then Rue gave Nevada an inscrutable look. "But you're not particular about throwin' a gun on—anybody?" he queried.

Nevada's cool bright stare was not so deceptive. And then he drawled, "Not at all—not at all, Mr. Rue. Shore it's just a habit. I never mean anythin' uncivil."

The two men passed on to a gaming-table. Nevada turned on his heel, muttering, "Damn them, anyhow. They just cain't let me alone."

Among others who entered presently was Cash Burridge. He was a tall man nearing forty, but he looked younger. He had the build of a horseman, a fine figure in top boots and spurs. Nevada was quick to see where he packed his gun. Burridge was a handsome, dissolute man, blond, with a curling mustache, almost gold, and light, gleaming, restless blue eyes.

Nevada knew that Burridge had seen him the instant of entrance, and he wondered what the outcome would be. Burridge had been the ringleader in the stage holdup to which Nevada had been a party. The one deed to which he owned with shame!

At length Burridge walked around between the tables to get to Nevada.

"Jim, I'm doggone glad to see you!" he said, extending his hand.

"Howdy, Cash!" replied Nevada, meeting the outstretched hand.

"It's good you blew in. I've often wondered what'd become of you. I'll tell you, Jim, I'm not curious about where you've been or what you've been doin', but I'm plumb interested in what you're goin' to do. Are you goin' to hole up here this winter, same as the rest of us?"

"Reckon I am, as far as I know," returned Nevada.

"Broke?" queried Burridge, with a knowing look.

"Shore am."

"I'm not so well heeled myself, but I can stake you to a roll."

"Thanks, Cash. But I don't like borrowin', an' maybe I never could pay back. I'll get a job for my keep heah."

"Jim, what'll you do after the snow flies?"

"I'll be hanged if I know," replied Nevada.

"That's all I wanted to hear," spoke up Burridge, with great satisfaction. "I've got a deal on—the biggest I ever handled. It's—"

"Cash, reckon you're not goin' to ask me to rustle cattle with you?" interrupted Nevada severely.

"No. I swear I'm not," hastily returned Burridge. "By Heaven! it's an honest deal, Jim."

"Wal, I'm glad to heah you say that. An' I'll listen to you."

"This ain't the place for us to talk. Besides, I've a poker game on. The deal I'm in is big; it's cattle, an' it's honest. I've got to have a hard-shootin' outfit, an' a leader with a reputation like yours."

"But, Cash, I heard you say this deal was honest."

"If it ain't then I don't know what honesty is," declared Burridge forcibly. "But you wait till I tell you all about the deal. And I'm givin' you a hunch. Keep it to yourself."

Burridge withdrew then to his card game, while Nevada returned to his chair by the fire. *What the devil is Cash up to now?* pondered Nevada. *Honest deal? Cattle? Hard-shootin' outfit? I'll be darned.*

Meanwhile the saloon and gambling-room filled up. Nevada sat beside the fire, glancing at it occasionally, but seeing always those who came in and went out.

A little later Lize Teller returned, and before he could get up to offer her the chair she had plumped herself over the arm.

"You sit still or I'll jump into your lap," she threatened, half petulantly and half merrily. She would have done it, too; therefore Nevada decided he had better be quiet.

"But, Lize, shore if you want to make a show of yourself, you don't need to pick on me," mildly protested Nevada.

"Jim Lacy, there isn't a man in this room, except you, who wouldn't put his arm round me if I sat like this on his chair. Listen! If you want to make me your friend—I say *friend*—forever, just be lover-like for a few minutes."

Nevada laughed at her in spite of his annoyance. "What're you up to, Lize?"

"Link Cawthorne just came in," she replied, tossing her black head defiantly.

"So I reckoned. Wal, Lize, it may be fun for you to use me in your little tricks, but it mightn't be funny for me. An' it might turn out bad for Link."

"That's why. He makes me sick. I'm so tired of him I ache. He's in there drinking. I want him to come in and find me with you."

"Lize, it strikes me you don't want very much a-tall," returned Nevada. "I hate to be rude to a lady, but *I* want to get up."

"I'll make it worse," she almost hissed. "You know me."

"All right. I reckon it's bad enough without you makin' it worse," he said with forced resignation.

"Bad? Bah! I can handle Link Cawthorne. All I want is for the conceited lout to *see* I can like some other man. There he comes," she whispered in fiendish glee, and then leaned over Nevada, radiant with some feeling quite beyond his comprehension.

Nevada looked up, not without a stir in his veins. Link Cawthorne stood with the bead curtain parted. How well Nevada remembered the heated face, the beady little eyes too close together, the reckless, weak, leering lips, the choice and manner of garb that inclined to dandyism. Indeed, he had been called the dandy outlaw, an epithet far from displeasing to him.

Link looked steadily at Lize, while she babbled to Nevada, apparently oblivious to her lover's advent.

Nevada's feeling, in that moment, changed from a good-natured contempt for Link and a vexation at his own part in this little farce to something vastly different. It seemed to be premonition that amounted to shock. He saw something, as a dream might foreshadow a future event—something that moved gray, cold, sickening across the swift stream of his consciousness.

Cawthorne halted before Lize and Nevada, bending his lean, hawklike head, with his elbows crooked and his hands at his hips. His right hand covered the butt of a gun belted high. His gimlet-eyes fastened first upon Lize, who did not turn her face away from Nevada for a long moment. Then Lize's glance traveled from Cawthorne's boots slowly upward, at last to meet his piercing gaze with surprise that seemed as genuine as insolent.

"Oh, you here?" she said. "Link, have you ever met my old friend, Jim Lacy?"

"Cat!" he spat out fiercely.

"Howdy, Link!" interposed Nevada, thinking to pour oil on the troubled waters. "Reckon Lize has forgotten *that* you an' me was ever acquainted at all."

"She forgot—hell!" responded Cawthorne in hard scorn. "Never mind Lize. I'll settle with her. I'm addressin' you, Jim Lacy."

Nevada looked steadily up at Cawthorne. "Ahuh. Wal, strikes me you're not very civil aboot it."

"Strikes me you're too familiar with Lize," flashed Cawthorne hotly.

"Familiar? Say, you're out of your haid. If it's any of your business, we're old acquaintances. Shore I never had nothin' but a brotherly feelin' for her. An' if she wants to sit on the arm of my chair—"

"Guff! She was sittin' on your lap. An' that won't go with me."

"Link, look for yourself," returned Nevada quietly. "Shore that isn't anythin' to raise a row, even if you an' she are engaged."

"Pooh!" burst out Lize airily.

"Jim Lacy, you're a liar!" Cawthorne burst out.

Lize, swift as a panther, slid off Nevada's chair, to spring erect. Nevada could not see her. He heard her panting breaths. He was gazing hard up at Cawthorne's face, which had suddenly turned white. In his ungovernable fury he had said what had not been calculated upon.

"Now, Link, I'm not a liar an' you know it," replied Nevada, without evident stress. "Reckon I can make allowance for your feelin's."

The young outlaw's face lost its pallor and rigidity. It waved red, and his hair appeared to bristle. His youth, his fury, his conceit, not to define his lack of penetration, misled him into mistaking Nevada's reply.

'I'll have no allowances from you," he shouted. "I'm invitin' you for a little walk outdoors."

Chapter Four

Cash Burridge's Proposition

NEVADA calmly rose to his feet and stepped aside from the chair. He did not believe that Cawthorne would attempt to draw on him, but as there was no certainty, he wanted to be on his feet.

Cawthorne, more emboldened every instant, shouted the louder, "I'm invitin' you outdoors."

"What for?" queried Nevada.

"You know what for."

"I haven't an idee, Link," went on Nevada. "Shore I see you're r'iled. But I reckon there's no call for me to get r'iled, too, aboot your mistake. If you've anything more to say, Link, why, go ahaid."

Cawthorne expanded under this completely unprecedented experience. A few drinks had addled his brains and an unreasonable jealousy had set them on fire.

"Say?" he demanded with a hoarse and pompous contempt. "I've no more to say. I've called you, an' you're yellow. That's all."

Whereupon he turned to the amazed and discomfited Lize and, half leading, half dragging her, left the room.

Nevada resumed his chair and drew it closer to the fire. He saw Hettie Ide's face in the golden glow of the fire. How he quivered in heart and body! He had been put to the test and he had been true to what she would have expected of him.

For nearly a week Nevada stayed away from the Gold Mine. Then one night at supper Mrs. Wood spoke up seriously:

"Jim, that big-mouthed Link Cawthorne is braggin' around you're afraid to come downtown."

"Wal, you don't say," drawled Nevada.

"Yes, I do say. I don't like it at all, Jim. You can't let him keep that up."

"Shore, I don't care what Link says."

"Son, that's not the way of the West," she went on gravely. "No man can afford to lose the respect of his associates, even if they are mostly a worthless outfit of gamblers, rustlers, an' sech. They can't understand it. Least of all Link Cawthorne can't. He's likely to shoot you from behind a corner an' swear he met you on an even break."

"But, Mother Wood, what can I do?" queried Nevada, robbed of his imperturbability.

"Well, as long as you're here in Lineville be Jim Lacy as *they* used to know him," she declared forcefully. "If you let this towhead run amuck with his brag, pretty soon he'll get the nerve actually to draw on you. Now, Jim, you don't want to have to kill him. You go downtown an' slap Link's face. Take his gun away from him an' stick it down the back of his pants!"

Nevada laughed mirthlessly. "Wal, maybe you're right," he said with a sigh. "By gosh, I wish spring would come, so I could hit the trail."

Nevada went back to the Gold Mine, once more doubtful that he could ever escape the inevitable consequences of his name.

Cash Burridge made at once for him, with all show of friendliness.

"Where you been, Lacy?" he inquired disapprovingly. "We've certainly looked for you here."

"Aw, been workin' hard an' goin' to bed early," replied Nevada. "Then, Cash, I reckon I wanted to avoid meetin' Cawthorne."

"Bah!" snorted Burridge. "You'll have to shoot that damned brag, an' the sooner you do it the better we'll all be pleased."

"Wal, we won't argue aboot it, Cash, but I'm not seein' it that way."

"Let's go up to my room, where we can have a quiet talk," said the other, and led the way through the hall and upstairs.

"Shore, you're comfortable heah," remarked Nevada, gazing around the room.

"I like it nice when I'm not in the saddle," returned Burridge. "Take a seat, an' if you won't drink have a smoke. One more word about this Link Cawthorne. He was harmless enough until Lize made him a snake in the grass. That girl is a hell's rattler. My advice is for you to beat the daylights out of Link or call his bluff an' kill him."

"Reckon I'm some worried," admitted Nevada.

"A man like you must always worry. You can't ever be free unless you hide your name. It's bad enough to have sheriffs after you, an' natural enemies, but it must be hell to know they're men who want to kill you just because of your reputation."

"Wal, I hope I don't get sore an' go back to drinkin'," said Nevada gloomily.

"Jim, I want to talk serious to you now," went on Burridge, with change of voice. "Lineville is gettin' a little too much travel to suit me. In another year it won't be any place for me, let alone you. Agree with me?"

"Shore do. When spring comes I go for good."

"Exactly. Same here. Now I want to tell you about my deal. An' if you don't want to go in with me, it'll be all right, only I want you to respect my confidence here in Lineville. Will you do it?"

"I reckon," replied Nevada soberly.

Burridge showed satisfaction at that assurance, but he plainly hesitated over the next disclosure.

"Jim you knew Setter was shot over in California?" he queried sharply.

"I heard it from Lize," rejoined Nevada matter-of-factly.

"Killed by a wild-hoss hunter," went on Burridge with emotion. "Jim, there are men who connect you with that gunplay."

"Shore. I get blamed for a lot of things."

"Well, that's none of my business, only I want to say that whoever killed Setter did me a good turn."

Burridge drew a long breath and laid aside his cigar. "Listen " he began with tenseness. "I was in on several deals with Setter. After he left here he sent for me to meet him at Klamath Falls. He had gotten in with big cattlemen an' had more money than he knew how to spend. He told me he wouldn't risk settlin' down in Oregon. He'd sell out there pretty soon, an' he wanted a new an' safe place. No more rustlin' or sharp speculation with other ranchers' money. He might marry. Anyway, he was goin' in for honest ranchin', an' wanted me as a partner. Well, the upshot was that he gave me a hundred thousand dollars to buy a well-stocked ranch in Arizona. I was to own half an' to help him develop cattle an' horses on a big scale. He had never been in Arizona, an' left the choice of place to me, makin' the provision that I find a wild an' unsettled range, where money would develop water."

Burridge halted in his narrative, and picking up his cigar he puffed on it a moment.

"Well," he resumed, "I went to Arizona an' rode hossback from the New Mexico border clear to the White Mountains. Talk about wild an' beautiful country! Arizona has everythin' beat. I bought out a rancher who had miles of grazin' range, an' ten thousand head of stock. After the deal was settled I began to get a few hunches. But I hustled back here an' sent word to Setter. He hadn't consummated his deals over there. I waited. No word came.

"I went back to Arizona—that was early last summer. Then I had my eyes opened. It was funny. Such a joke on *me*, an' especially Setter. Well, I had been huntin' for wild country, an' you can gamble I'd hit on it. Our cattle were bein' rustled right an' left. I suspected the very cowmen I'd taken over with the property. It was a grand big country—desert canyon plateau. There were many more ranchers an' cattle than I'd suspected. Some of these ranchers were rustlers, thick with the worst of the outfits. You've heard of the Hash Knife gang an' the Pine Tree outfit. But nobody seemed to know just *who* belonged to them an' *who* didn't. Then there were some hard nuts known to everybody."

Burridge made a final flourish with the cigar he had let go out. "Now when I got back here a few weeks ago I sent word to Setter an' waited. No reply. Then we heard Setter was dead. Hardy Rue brought the news. I've a hunch he's got somethin' up his sleeve. Any-

way, he knew Setter, an' I'm not worryin'. That property in Arizona is mine. An' my job is to get back there to run it. Here's where you come in. I'll make you foreman an' give you an interest. It'll take some fightin' to keep my cattle. I want a bunch of the hardest-ridin' an' hardest-shootin' boys that can be hired. An' you to lead them! An' now a last word, Jim. You know that many an honest an' prosperous rancher was once a rustler. What do you think an' what do you say?"

"Wal, Cash, reckon I'll think more'n I say," returned Nevada ponderingly. "You shore talked straight. It's a darn interestin' story. What the courts might say about it I cain't guess. But I reckon half that hundred thousand Setter gave you is honestly yours. Maybe the other half, too. Nobody could tell just how much money Setter earned an' what he got speculatin'. Yes, sir, I reckon the Arizona ranch is yours, all right."

"Good. I'm glad you see the deal that way," replied Burridge, rubbing his hands together. "An' you'll accept my offer?"

"Cash, I cain't promise that yet," responded Nevada slowly. "Reckon I want time to think about it. There's a couple of points that'll shore be hard to get over."

"What are they, Jim? I might help you."

"Wal, the first is—your past deals might crop up any day."

"I thought long about that," returned Burridge, "an' at last I figured myself free of any worry. I'm not known in Arizona. An' what do any two-bit deals here amount to? They'll be forgotten after I've gone."

"Reckon you don't miss it far," replied Nevada. "But my second point is the serious an' important one."

"Shoot!" replied Burridge.

"Wal, Cash, I don't mean any offense, but I'm just plain doubtful that you can *ever* go straight."

Burridge threw his cigar at the stove and the dark blood waved over his face in a tide. "By Heaven! that sticks in my craw, too! I wonder. But I'm no damn fool an' I'm not without some brains."

"Shore. I admit that. But, Cash, you've asked my opinion an' heah it is. You've a weakness for women an' red liquor. An' the crux of the deal is —can you stand prosperity?"

"Ha! I never had a chance to find out," replied Burridge, clenching his fist. "I've got it now. We'll see. I swear I want to make the best of it. An' I'd do better with my chance if I had you beside me. That's all."

"Wal, I appreciate that, Cash, an' I'll sure think it over," said Nevada.

The short days passed, the snow fell, adding to Nevada's work. In the evenings, if the weather was not stormy, he would drop in at the Gold Mine. Burridge had made another strong plea for Nevada to join him, and then had left for Arizona.

Lize Teller had passed from jest to earnest in her mood toward Nevada. She was vain, willful, and malignant when under the influence of drink. During the early part of the winter she had made love to Nevada, more, he thought, to inflame Cawthorne than for any other reason. But the time

came, which was coincident with Cawthorne's further bold attempt to aggravate Nevada into a fight, when she ceased wholly her flirting with Nevada. Soon after that she broke her engagement with Cawthorne and took to wild flirtations and drinking bouts with the gamblers. She lost all restraint and began to fail in health.

When Nevada at length took her to task, he received an answer that gave him concern.

"No decent man wants me and I'm slated for hell," she told him bitterly.

From this speech Nevada conceived the idea that somehow he had failed the girl. It could not have been otherwise, yet the fact hurt him. Another side of the situation was the peril she had incurred by jilting Cawthorne. There was, however, no use in talking to Lize about that. Whenever Cawthorne accosted her, whether humbly or harshly, she flouted him as she would have a repulsive dog.

One afternoon Nevada, actuated by an impulse beyond his ken, bent his steps toward the Gold Mine. All night an oppression had persisted through his slumbers, and all morning he had been restless, brooding.

He entered the place by the side door, and paused in the hall before the entrance to the gambling-room. The usual quiet of that den had been disrupted.

With his left hand Nevada quickly opened the door and entered sidewise, his right arm crooked. The room was full of men, all standing. Cards, coins, chips, glasses on the tables showed evidence of having been violently abandoned. There followed whispers, a cough, shuffling of feet. The noise that had halted Nevada came from the saloon. Suddenly it augmented to a banging on the bar accompanied by the bellow of a harsh voice.

"Rum! Hand it out—er I'll bust your head, too!"

Nevada strode to the nearest group of men. Something terrible had happened. He saw it in their faces.

"What's happened?" he queried.

"There's been a hell of a mess," replied one.

"Jim, we was playin' our caird games," spoke up the gambler, Ace Black, "when we heerd an awful row in the hall there. Then a woman's screams, quick hushed. I'll tell you. An' after that a heavy fall. We all jumped up an' someone rushed out to see what it was. An' by Gawd—"

"Wal?" broke in Nevada, cool and grim.

"Lize Teller! She was layin' half naked, streamin' blood. Link Cawthorne had beat her over the head with his gun. She'll die! An' listen to him!"

In three long bounds Nevada had reached and split the beaded door-curtain. His swift eye swept all.

"*Cawthorne!*" he yelled in a loud piercing voice that brought an instant breathless silence.

Chapter Five

Hettie Ide

IT WAS springtime in northern California. Old Mt. Shasta stood up grandly, his vast snow-slopes beginning to be ridged by black. From the Tule Lake depression the land waved upward in wide belts, brown and gray, and at last green as emerald.

The wide acres of the Ide ranch, mostly lake-bottom land that the drain-

ing of Tule Lake had made available, spread rich and fertile along the southern shore. The squares of brown soil but recently ploughed, the fields beginning to show a tinge of green, the pasture lands, the droves of horses and herds of cattle, the hedge fences, the orchards, the neat sheds and the rambling red-roofed barn, and the white house half hidden in a grove of maples and pines—all these amply testified to the prosperity of the Ides.

Hettie Ide had awakened this morning twenty years old. The wild geese had come back from their pilgrimage to the south, and were honking as if they knew it was her birthday and that on this beautiful May day she must be joyous with young life.

But Hettie had a secret sorrow, which she hid deep in her heart, while she ministered to her ailing mother, and shared with her brother Ben the one bitter drop in his cup of happiness.

As Hettie tripped down the stairs she heard Ina shrieking with laughter, no doubt at little Blaine's pranks. How happy they were and how blessed by God!

Hettie went outdoors. What a glorious morning! Bright and warm was the sun; the birds were singing in the maples; the wild-lilac buds were bursting with pink.

She found Ben sitting on top of the corral fence. California Red was inside, and he did not like it. Hettie loved this wonderful horse for his beauty, his spirit, and for another reason which only Ben would ever have suspected.

California Red had been in captivity four years. He had been broken, yet never had lost his spirit. Red was never gentle, but, on the other hand, he had not one mean trait. He shone red, glossy, silken, beautiful, and his long mane was a flame. He was a big horse, yet so perfectly proportioned that most observers would not have judged his size. High and rangy, with body round as a barrel, a wonderful deep wide chest, legs powerful, yet not heavy, and an arching neck and noble head, he looked indeed what he had been for years, the wild stallion king of the sage hills of northern California.

Hettie climbed to a seat beside her brother.

"Mawnin', pard," she drawled, mimicking the accent of one neither of them ever forgot.

"Wal, howdy there, old girl!" replied Ben, surprising her with his answering drawl.

"What're you doing, Ben?" she asked brightly, as she took his hand in both hers.

"I was just coaxing that red son-of-a-gun," he replied, nodding at the stallion.

"Red doesn't seem to obey you very well."

"I'd have to rope him before he'd lay down those ears."

"Ben, you mustn't expect him to grow tame."

"Tame? No, I only want him to love me."

"Perhaps love was left out of Red's make-up," laughed Hettie. "Or perhaps he can't forgive you for taking him from his sage hills."

"It's four years now," said Ben thoughtfully. "What a long time! I couldn't ask a finer, gamer horse. But I—I always seem to want something from Red—I never get."

"Ben dear," replied Hettie, pressing his hand, "what you want is something —someone to tame Red."

"I reckon—the only man who ever could tame Red," muttered Ben.

"Your old pard, Nevada," she whispered.

Ben dropped his head, and his gloved hand closed tight on Hettie's.

"Ben, this is my birthday," she spoke up softly.

"Well, so it is," replied her brother, starting out of his reverie. "I plumb forgot. Let's see, you must be eighteen --nineteen."

"Twenty," she added gravely.

"How time flies! Why, you're a grown woman, and a darned fine handsome one, too. But you always seem my kid sister."

And as he turned to kiss her cheek she saw tears in his dark eyes. There were threads of gray, too, in the hair over Ben's temples. That shocked Hettie. He, so young and strong and virile! But Ben, all those long years exiled from his home, outcast and wild-horse hunter, had led a lonely and hard life. It was Nevada who had saved him. And now, as so often in the past, she prayed God to bless Nevada.

"Ben," she spoke up, "if I'm a woman now I'm old enough to be listened to. Let me talk to you as I want—as I need to."

"Hettie, I'm sorry you had to ask me that," he returned contritely. "But you hurt so. And I thought you just a—a sentimental girl—that you'd forget."

"Forget *him*? Never," she whispered. "Have you forgotten?"

"If I ever do may God forgive me."

"Ben, I know your secret, and I think Ina knows, too," went on Hettie earnestly. "We are dear friends—nay, we're sisters. She's so good—so lovable. We have talked often. You remember when Ina came home from college—when you were a poor wild-horse hunter and Father almost hated you—remember how Ina and I plotted for you and Nevada. How we fought for you!"

"Ah, Hettie—I do remember," said Ben dreamily.

"Well, Ina and I know what ails you. It's loss of your pard, Nevada!"

"No, Hettie dear, *not* all loss of mine," burst out Ben passionately. "I could stand loss. But what has grieved and shamed me—and, well, broken my heart—is that Nevada saved me, made all my good fortune, my happiness, possible, by sacrificing himself. Father forgave me, took me back home. Hart Blaine was proud to give me his talented and beautiful daughter, the richest girl in all this valley of rich ranchers. Then Father died, leaving me rich. I should say leaving us rich, for half of all this wonderful ranch is yours, Hettie. Next little Blaine came to bless me—my boy! And Nevada went back to where he came from. God only knows where that is. I've spent a lot of money searching the West for a lean-faced rider who drawled his Texas accent—and answered to the name Nevada. And I can't find him."

"Someday you will, Ben," she whispered.

"Always I believed I would," went on Ben. "But it's four years now. And that Forlorn River Ranch of ours is now worth a fortune. Half of that is Nevada's. Half of the Mule Deer Flat Ranch is Nevada's. He's worth money. Why didn't he come back? Why didn't he ever write? Oh, damn him—damn him!"

"Hush—Ben," returned Hettie. "You don't mean to damn Nevada. Don't you understand that the reason he disappeared like that was not because he feared the law might hold him for killing those wicked men who had trapped you. No! But because he feared we

would find out who he really was. Oh, I know, Ben. That was it. Nevada had been bad. How bad I dare not imagine. Oh, Ben, I fear Nevada had been some great and terrible gunman!"

"Gunman?" queried Ben, almost harshly. "I reckon so. He handled a gun so marvelously. But what was that to me—and what would I care?"

"Ben, dear, you quite overlook something," rejoined Hettie bravely, while she felt the hot blood mount to cheek and temple. "Nevada loved not only you—but me too—and I—I loved him."

"Well, now, Hettie," replied Ben, strangely softened, "I reckon that's no news, though you never declared it so—so openly. But why should it make such a difference?"

"The boy came of a good family. He had fine instincts. And one of them was an instinct to disappear when there was danger of my learning who he really was. There can be no other reason. He had pride. And he loved me so—so well, he couldn't bear to shame me."

"Damn him, anyway!" burst out Ben again. "He's broken your heart, too."

"Not yet," replied Hettie, in strong vibrating tones.

"Hettie, did that son-of-a-gun make love to you?" queried Ben.

"Did—he?" she murmured, with a little broken laugh. "Ben, when he found out I cared—he—he made the most terrible love to me. Oh, I can never forget—never get over it!"

"Well!" ejaculated her brother, amazed out of his own pain. "And you—my little sixteen-year-old sister!"

"Ben, didn't Ina Blaine love *you* when she was five years old—and ten—and fourteen?" queried Hettie. "And at eighteen after she'd been away four years?"

"Thank the Lord, she did. But did my pard, Nevada, ever know you, too, had that strange, glorious thing—woman's love—for him?"

"Yes, Nevada knew," replied Hettie eloquently. "He knew he had my faith, too. And Ben, *that* is why I've never lost him. Nevada is not dead. He is not false to me—to what I believed he had become. And somewhere, somehow, he will come back to me—to us."

"My God! that's good to hear! You strike me right in the heart, Hettie."

"I'm glad. I've wanted to speak for long," replied Hettie simply. "And there's another thing that touches us closely."

"What's that, Hettie?" he asked anxiously.

"Mother is failing. She has brightened up since spring came. Mother loves the sun, the trees, the flowers, the birds. But winter is long and cold here. She dreads the icy wind. I believe that this valley is bad for her health."

"I've been afraid of that very thing," declared her brother thoughtfully.

"Mother's not old," said Hettie. "She ought to live many years yet. But we must do something to help her. Ben, I suggest you take her to San Francisco. Get the advice of some up-to-date physician. Take Ina with you. Blaine will be safe with me. I'll run the ranch, never fear."

"By George! it's a great idea," declared Ben with amazing enthusiasm. He leaped down off the corral fence, then turned to help Hettie. "Ina will be tickled. She'll get her brother Marvie to stay with you."

With arms locked, Hettie and Ben hurried down the lane, eager with the import of new hopes, happier than they had been for a long time.

Ina was in the yard, gathering violets, which matched the color of her eyes. Little Blaine babbled at sight of his father and ran as fast as his short fat legs could carry him.

Ben snatched the boy up and, holding him on his arm, he confronted Ina with a smile.

"How soon can you get ready for a little trip to San Francisco, Ina?" he asked.

"What!" she cried, the color flashing to her beautiful face. "How soon? Fifteen minutes!"

"Ha! Ha! I thought you'd hit the saddle and ride that idea pronto," said Ben happily. "But you needn't be so swift as that."

"Ben, are you really going to take me to San Francisco?" asked Ina eagerly.

"Yes. It's all settled. But—"

"You darling," she cried, kissing him. "I wanted to go somewhere. San Francisco! Oh!"

"Ina, I'm sorry I don't think of such things," replied Ben ruefully. "You must thank Hettie."

Whereupon Ina embraced Hettie, and then, coming down to earth, she said, "Let's go in to breakfast. You can tell me there all about this grand idea of going to San Francisco."

The only hitch in the plans concerned the coming of Marvie Blaine to stay at the Ide Ranch. Hart Blaine would not allow his son to go.

There was trouble between Marvie and his father, for which, in Ben's opinion, both were equally to blame.

"Sure reminds me of my scrap with Dad," remarked Ben to Hettie. "Only *I* was right and Dad was wrong. Marvie refused to go to college. Reckon he's not so different from me. He likes horses and the open country."

So Hettie was left alone in the Ide homestead with little Blaine and the two women servants. She rather welcomed the solitude.

The running of the ranch had at first seemed something that would be pleasure, rather than work. She discovered presently that it was not only work, but an extremely embarrassing and exasperating task. There were eighteen hands employed on the lake ranch, and as many more out in the hills. Most of these employees were young men of the valley, unmarried, and very desirous of changing that state of single blessedness. And there were several riders, long, lean, rangy fellows from the South, with whom Hettie grew most annoyed. They continually found reasons to ride in to the ranch.

These droll boys of the open range paid court to her, wholly oblivious of her rebuffs. In two weeks' time the whole contingent was in love with Hettie or trying to make her believe so. And all tasks pertaining to the operation of Ben Ide's ranches had to be talked over elaborately with the temporary mistress.

Hettie had fun out of it, except in the case of the several quiet-eyed riders from the hills. They made love to her. Moreover, they reminded her of Nevada, and that inflamed her lonely, hungry heart.

If Nevada had come to mind often in the past, what did he do now but haunt every hour? She saw him in every one of the range riders. Hettie saw his lean, fine still face, so clean-cut

and brown, with the sleepy eyes that yet could wake to flame and also smile with a light she had never seen in any other. His old black sombrero, with bullet holes in the crown, had seemed picturesque and beautiful. His old silk scarf with the checks of red, the worn leather wristbands, the high top-boots with their scalloped edges, and their long bright jingling spurs—how well she remembered them, how vividly they were limned in the eye of her memory! Then, as something inevitable at the end of reminiscence, something that seemed an inseparable part of Nevada, she recalled the dark and heavy gun he had always worn. It had bumped against her as she walked beside him. When he had taken her in his arms, even in the sweet madness of that moment, she had felt the gun hard and cold against her.

She had lived and suffered during the four years since Nevada had ridden away, leaving death and calamity behind him. She was a woman now. She saw differently. She divined what she had been to him—how her friendship and love had uplifted him. How great and enduring had her own love become!

What did it matter who Nevada was or what he was before he came to Ben and me? she mused, sitting by the open window in the dark. *But he could not see that. Yet he must have known it would not matter to me, so long as he kept himself the Nevada we knew and loved. Would he ever fall to rustling cattle, if that had once been his crime? No! Would he ever drink again? No! Could he sink to the embrace of some bad woman? Never! Will he use again that terrible gun? Ah, he* will! *I feel it. If not for himself, then for someone. He was flame and lightning to destroy!*

Chapter Six

A Change for the Ides

ONE day several strangers from Klamath Falls called upon Hettie. They were business men, representing an Oregon syndicate, who were buying up land around Tule Lake Valley. Hettie was shrewd enough to grasp that some situation had arisen, such as the possibility of a railroad from Klamath Falls, to increase the value of the Ide property enormously. She neither refused nor accepted the offer, saying that control of the ranches was in her brother's hand.

Hettie happened to be out on the farm when her people returned; and upon coming back to the house, what was her surprise and joy to be waylaid in the hall by her mother and Ina. It took no second glance to see that the little trip had been happily beneficial for all

When they reached the sitting-room, Hettie was on the verge of tears.

"Oh—Ben," she cried, "I—I fell down on running the ranch! The silly fools nagged me—to death!"

"Who did?" queried Ben, suddenly aghast.

"The boys—and some of the men—too. They just—made my life—miserable."

"Well! The lazy sons-of-guns!" ejaculated Ben. "I'll fire the whole caboodle of them."

"Oh no, Ben. It's not so—so bad as that. They only hatched every pretense and excuse to approach me—just to make outrageous love."

Ben's haw-haw mingled with Ina's scream of laughter. Hettie had to

accept that mirth with the best grace possible.

Nothing was said during supper about the main object of the journey to San Francisco. Ina told of their trips to the stores, and Ben of their jaunts to seashire and parks and theaters. Later, when Mrs. Ide had retired, Ben took Hettie into Ina's room.

"Well, Hettie, your sending us off on this trip means a great change in our lives," began Ben gravely. "Winter and spring are too damp and cold for Mother. To keep her here longer will endanger her life."

"Then we certainly won't keep her," replied Hettie resolutely. "Will Mother —be all right in some other climate?"

"She'll get well," answered Ben. "She needs a mild, dry, warm climate in winter and a high, dry, bracing climate in summer."

"Where can we find them?"

"Easy enough. But the thing that stumps Ina and me is how to decide what's best to do."

"That's easy enough," returned Hettie "I will go with Mother and live with her."

"Sure you will. However, the point is I don't want to be separated from Mother and you. Neither does Ina. We won't be separated."

Hettie gazed with suddenly dim eyes at her brother. "Ben, you can't imagine how happy you make me. Separation would be hard. I have only Mother and you and yours to live for If you won't let Mother and me leave you—"

"We've sure got to go with you," interrupted Ben forcibly. "But what to do is sure a sticker."

"Sell—out!" said Hettie huskily. "Ben, I can sell this lake property of ours for two hundred thousand."

Her brother stared at her. At length he spoke: "Hettie, don't make wild statements like that."

"I can sell for that *tomorrow*," grandly added Hettie, conscious of a sudden tremendous importance, and then she briefly told about the offer of the Klamath Falls syndicate.

"Girls, it's settled, it's done!" cried Ben. He kissed Ina and hugged Hettie. He tore up and down the room.

"Ben, aren't you ashamed? All that show of gladness over selling our home!" exclaimed Ina reproachfully.

Ben ceased his violent expressions and faced them, quite pale, with his dark eyes full of fire.

"Forgive me and try to understand," he said. "Remember I have not the tender associations with Tule Lake that actuate you girls. It is home and I reckon I love it, but not as you. Father was hard on me for years. For years more I lived over there across the sage hills, hunting wild horses, lonely and wretched. Then Nevada dropped into my life. Then, Ina, you came, too. And so between you I was brought home again. But despite all, there has been something lacking. This ranch country is too populated for me. It is too rich. There's not enough hard work for me. The sage hills and the valleys, once so wild, are now ranches and farms. I'd be happier in a new country —say in Arizona, where the ranges are vast and ranches few. I'd do better, working as I used to. That's why I'm glad to sell out here."

"Arizona!" murmured Hettie growing thoughtful. "Isn't it very wild and lonely?"

"Wild? I reckon," replied Ben. "Arizona has vast grass and sage ranges, desert and valley, canyons and mountains, great forests, great rivers. There are thousands of wild horses in Arizona.

It has minerals—gold, silver, copper. There's just been war between cattlemen and sheepmen. Oh, it is a wonderful country for the pioneer."

"Hettie," added Ina, "we met an Arizonian in Frisco, a grizzled old fellow. He surely was full of Arizona. But Ben didn't tell you all."

"What'd I forget?" inquired Ben lamely.

"About the bad crews who live off the ranchers—Indians, Mexicans, rustlers, horse thieves, wild cowboys, gunmen—and I don't remember who else. That plan of Arizona worries me, Ben."

"It'd worry me, too, if I thought I'd fall into such company as the old Arizonian bragged about. At that, though, I think I could stand a few wild cowboys. Couldn't you, Hettie?"

Hettie tried to smile, but her effort was a wan one. There had seemed to come a knocking at her heart.

"I'll keep Forlorn River Ranch and Mule Deer Flat," mused Ben, pacing the room. "We own them, Nevada and I, share and share alike. Someday I'll come back to see them, and who knows?"

Hettie lay sleepless and distracted late into the hours of the night.

There was regret, of course, mingled with the emotions roused by the thought of leaving Tule Lake, where she had lived all her life. But not regret was it that threatened to bring tears. Rather a joy rising from the depths of her! The old oppressive certainty that Nevada would never come back to Forlorn River was now lifted from her heart. She would no longer eat her heart out in waiting. Over there in wild Arizona she might see him again. Ben would never cease to search for Nevada. Surely he would locate him some day!

Chapter Seven

Bad News

IT WAS late July and the Ides were comfortably camped on a running brook in a grove of cottonwoods outside the little Arizona hamlet of Sunshine. Ben scoured the ranges round about in search of a new home.

Hettie had never seen a man so full of zest and thrill over any project. His happy eagerness seemed reflected in all. But on the other hand, it turned out he had difficulty in finding a place which suited him.

"I want a thousand acres or more—five thousand if I can get them," he said. "Good water most important. Next I want grass and timber. Next a fine site for a ranch house, with a splendid view."

"Say, Boss, you sure don't want very much a-tall," declared old Raidy, one of his men, a little sarcastic. "Why, they hain't got all thet in this darned country."

Hettie shared Ben's enthusiasm, and encouraged him in his ambition. They had journeyed days up from the Colorado River to this high plateau, where westward the gray-green range seemed like a vast ocean, waving away into purple distance. To the north and east it rose to dark red-banded mountains. Hettie loved the physical attributes of this bewildering Arizona, and so did Ina. But both of them were anxiously concerned about the wildness of the place, the aloofness of the few settlers,

herders, riders whom they met, the fact that those mystic, forbidding mountains, seemingly so close, were no other than the Mogollons, which Ben had been cautioned to avoid.

After an absence of three days Ben returned on the train late one afternoon, to descend upon his camp like a whirlwind.

Hettie, who first heard him, called out to Ina, "It's Ben. And you can bet we're settled now."

They ran out to find him surrounded by his men, from whom, as Ina eagerly called, he broke away.

Whereupon she and Hettie and his mother were treated to bearish hugs, accompanied by various exclamations.

"Oh, gee! Oh, gee!" he continued, dragging them all to the camp table and benches under a cottonwood. "I've bought my ranch."

"Where?" asked Ina.

"Sixty miles from Winthrop and about a hundred from here. A thousand acres. Fine grazing all around. No other ranches near. Ten thousand head of cattle. Forty thousand dollars! Isn't that a bargain?"

"It remains to be seen. You've settled the deal, then?"

"I should smile," he replied.

"Did you see all those ten thousand cattle? Count them?"

"Gracious, no! Ina, do you think I'm chain lightning? I took their word for it. The lawyer I engaged in Winthrop found the title of property okay. So I bought."

"Ben, I hope your ranch isn't out there—toward those Mogollons," said Hettie, breaking silence and pointing across the desert to the strange dark uplands.

"By George! Hettie, it *is*," he declared, smacking a hand on his knee. "It's right under the brakes of the Mogollons. But such a beautiful wild country. I couldn't resist it. Listen. I'll tell you all about it. Day before yesterday I rode back to Winthrop after a hard and disappointing trip to half a dozen ranches. I was pretty discouraged. Some horsemen rode up to the hotel where I was sitting out in front. They got off and tied up to the hitching-rail. These Arizonians are sure a rangy, hard-looking lot. But this outfit struck me as one to look at twice. Several of them packed two guns. They had fine horses and saddles. When they went in to drink I asked a cattleman sitting near me who and what they were.

" 'Wal,' he said, 'it ain't done in these parts—talkin' aboot your neighbors. Sort of onhealthy.'

"Presently some one touched me on the shoulder. I turned round to see one of the riders, a tall fellow, blond and good-looking. He had eyes that looked right through you, but his manner was easy, friendly. 'Excuse me, sir,' he said. 'Are you the Californian who's lookin' for a ranch hereabouts?' "

" 'Yes, sir. My name's Ide,' I replied, 'and I'm not having much luck.' "

" 'They tell me you're hard to please. But I'm makin' bold to ask you personally just what kind of a ranch you want to buy?' "

"So I up and told him, elaborately, just what I was looking for. Then he laughed, sort of amused, and said. 'My name's Burridge. I've got exactly what you want. Somewhere around ten thousand head. Lots of unbranded calves an' yearlin's. Cabins an' corrals not worth speakin' of. But water, grass, timber, an' range can't be beat in Arizona. It suits me to sell for cash. That's what they call me—Cash Burridge. Suppose you get a lawyer an' come over to

the city hall an' see my title. Then if it strikes you right, I'll take you out to my ranch.'

"Well," went on Ben, "Mr. Cash Burridge hit me about right. I liked his blunt way of putting the deal. I consulted a lawyer, and we met Burridge at the town hall. The title was clear. So I told Burridge I'd like a look at his property. We started right out in a buckboard behind a team of fast horses, I'll tell you. For thirty miles or more the road was good. Then we pitched off into what he called the brakes. Briefly, that part of the road was a terror. It was only a trail, up and down, narrow and rough. Burridge said there was a better way in, but longer.

"We reached his ranch before sunset. I'm only going to tell you that it was the most beautiful and wildest place I ever saw in my life. But the cabins were filthy, tumbledown huts. I slept out under the pines. This morning I was up before sunrise, and if I ever fell in love with anything, it is that place. It was on a high slope, with level benches reaching out, all covered with pines. I saw deer, wolves, bear, turkeys, antelope right from where I stood. Also, everywhere I looked there were cattle. You can look out from the high pine benches down over the most beautiful valley of grass and sage and cedar, and then down into the red-and-gold desert, over a hundred miles away. Right there I asked Burridge how much he wanted. He said fifty thousand. On a venture I offered forty. He thought it over and took me up. We returned to Winthrop and closed the deal, at noon today. I'll make that the finest ranch in Arizona. We'll go out there at once and camp, and start the work of home building. If I don't miss my guess, you'll all fall in love with it as quickly as I did."

"Ben, am I in on this ranch deal with you?" asked Hettie gravely.

"That's for you to say, my dear sister," replied Ben. "But I believe I'd rather you didn't come in, for it is a risk."

"Then if Ina has no objection, I'll take the risk."

"So will I. We'll share the risk, and together make a grand success of it," added Ina happily.

Ben hired a guide from Winthrop to lead his horses and riders across country to the ranch. On the next day the wagons made Winthrop, where Ben expected to meet Burridge, as agreed. But Burridge failed to appear. Ben said this was strange, as Burridge was due to take his outfit over the better road and to make a count of the cattle.

Whereupon Ben procured another guide, a Mexican sheepherder, who guaranteed to pilot the heavily laden wagons safely to their destination.

About the middle of the afternoon, two days later, the travelers rode to the edge of open light forest.

"We're here," shouted Ben, leaping down. "California to Arizona! Ina—Mother—Blaine—Hettie, get down and come in, as these Arizonians say."

"Gee! I see turkeys!" cried Marvie Blaine, leaping off his horse and tearing his rifle from the saddle sheath. Marvie, whose father had agreed to let him accompany the others, for a trial year, was a tall well-built youth, freckled and homely, with fine clear eyes.

"Indian!" called Ben, after him.

Hettie sat under a great spreading pine on the edge of one of the level

benches that sloped down into the open sage and cedar country.

She had tramped around until exhausted. She had passed by the long-unused and dilapidated corrals, and the ruined old log cabin which Ben had laughingly told the stricken Ina was to be their abode. The brook that came singing down from the dark forest slope above caused Hettie to linger and listen to its music. Across the brook on another bench stood another old log cabin, or in fact two small one-roomed cabins, with porch between, and all sheltered under one long sloping wide-eaved roof of rough moss-stained shingles. The picturesqueness of this woodland structure appealed to Hettie. Warily she peeped in, with vivid sense of the vacant speaking rooms and tumbled-down stone fire-places, and the lofts that reached out over half the rooms. What had happened there? How dark, musty, woody!

I'll make this my abode and Mother's, she decided, with a thrill at the prospect of home-building. *Repairs, windows, floors, sheathing! Oh! I can see it! I'll not have a new house.*

And so at last she had found herself on the edge of the wide bench, back against the last pine, with fascinated gaze riveted upon the view that Ben had raved about.

"No wonder!" whispered Hettie. "If there were nothing else, *that* would be enough."

Her position was on the edge of the irregular timber line, which stretched on each side of her, with fringes of the forest here running down to end in straggling lonesome pines, and there skirting the edge of the steep benches, as if the greatest of landscape gardeners had planted them there. And so He had, Hettie averred! What majestic pines!

But it was the desert that enchanted Hettie. How soft, how marvelously purple and gray, how grandly the slope fell for league on league, widening, rolling, lengthening, descending, down to the blazing abyss of sand and rock and canyon.

Sage and grass in the foreground gave that vast valley its softest beauty, its infinite charms. How like troops of great beasts appeared the isolated green cedars and the lonely jutting rocks, some gray, others red. This valley was a portal down to the dim unknown. On each side it swelled to ranges of foothills, themselves like the trains of colossal camels trooping down to drink. They were rounded, soft as clouds, gray and pink and faintly green, without a tree, a rock to mar their exquisite curve. From the dignity of low mountains these hills dwindled in size until they were mere mounds that at last flattened out into the desert.

"I can only look—and learn to worship," whispered Hettie in a rapture. "It awakens me! Oh, lonely wild land—oh, Arizona! if you shelter *him* my prayer is answered, my cup is full!"

The Ides, imbued with Ben's spirit, set earnestly to work to wrest a beautiful home from this wilderness.

Two gangs of Mexican laborers were put to work clearing and grading a road, felling and hauling timber. Teamsters from Winthrop made a trip out every other day, bringing lumber, shingles, windows and doors, bricks and cement, pipe and plumbing, which were housed in a temporary shelter.

Carpenters began to erect Ben's house, which was to be a long, one-story structure. Barns and corrals were planned, a reservoir from which the cold spring water could be piped into the houses and corrals, corn cribs and storehouses, and many other practical things Ben considered necessary.

Those were busy days. There were many visitors, mostly sheepherders and cowmen from the surrounding range. Occasionally riders on high-gaited horses rode in, watched the work from a distance, looked long at Ben's fine horses, and especially California Red, and rode away without any pretense of friendliness. Old Raidy shook his head dubiously at sight of these men. Apparently they caused no concern to Ben Ide.

Hettie imagined that she alone divined what was going on in her brother's mind. She believed that Ben had deliberately chosen this wild spot to develop a famous ranch, which would become a lodestone for cowboys, ranchers, cattlemen of all types, sheepmen, rustlers, outlaws, gunmen, through one of whom he might locate his lost friend Nevada.

Hence, Hettie decided, Ben's intense interest in all visitors did not spring wholly from his desire to be neighborly. Yet, despite the good words that at once spread abroad his generosity and kindliness, and the fact that his coming meant much for this section of Arizona, the ranchers along the three hundred miles of the Mogollon Plateau were slow to call. Nor did Cash Burridge come to count the cattle he had sold Ben.

One hot midday, when Ben and his family were having lunch in the shade of the pines, a rider appeared on the road. He came on at a walk and he was looking everywhere with great interest. Finally arriving at the camp quarters, he dismounted and hailed the riders in a booming voice.

"I'm Tom Day an' I'm wantin' to meet Mr. Ide."

Raidy led him up to Ben, who rose expectantly, a smile on his sunburned face.

"Howdy, sir!" said the visitor, extending a huge hand. "Are you Mr. Ide?"

"Yes, and I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Day," replied Ben, who evidently had heard of this man.

"I'm your nearest neighbor," said Day. "My ranch is over heah ten miles or so. Reckon I'm a little late in callin'. Shore we're pretty slow folks in Arizona."

"Better late than never," returned Ben with his frank smile. "Meet my family, Mr. Day. This is Ina, my wife —and this my mother—Hettie, my sister—And this is my son Blaine, who's destined to be an Arizona rancher."

"Wal now, I'm shore glad to meet you-all," drawled the visitor, with an accent so surely Texan that it made Hettie's heart leap.

Hettie trusted him at first sight. This huge Texan had a shock of fair hair, beginning to turn gray. His broad face was wrinkled like a brown parchment, recording the endurance, toil, and strife of a wonderful life. He had shrewd, penetrating, kindly eyes, set under bushy brows.

"Reckon I'd like you to show me aboot," said Day to Ben, waving his hand toward the benches.

"I'll be glad to, and I'd like your opinion on some of my new-fangled ideas," replied Ben.

They strolled away in earnest conversation and did not return for an

hour. Whereupon Hettie set lunch for them on the table under the fly; after which she repaired to her wagon-tent close by.

"Ide, the good looks of thet sister of yours has spread over the range," said Day. "Shore, she's a lovely lass."

"Hettie? Thanks. Yes indeed, and she's more than pretty," replied Ben, evidently much pleased.

"Girls are scarce in Arizona. Is she married?"

"No. Why, Hettie's only twenty!"

"Engaged to any lucky feller?"

"No, I'm sure not."

"Wal, she'll shore have these long-legged punchers comin' around moon-eyed."

"If they don't they're not like my California riders," laughed Ben.

"Ide, I reckon I've taken a shine to you. It ain't Arizona ways, but somebody ought to give you some hunches."

"Mr. Day, I take that as a compliment and an offer of friendship," returned Ben heartily. "Lord knows I'm going to need a friend out here."

"Wal, heah's my hand," said Day, "an' I'm shore seein' you're not such a damn fool as is bein' gossiped over the range."

"Maybe I *am* a damn fool, Day," returned Ben grimly. "But at least I know what I'm going to do in the long run."

"All right. Fust off, are you goin' in for big cattle-raisin'?"

"Yes. And horses, too."

"Ahuh. You shore have some fine stock. Thet red hoss! Say, he's grand! Reckon you'll have to keep him close or he'll be stolen. Are you goin' to keep your family heah all the year round?"

"No. I'll take or send them back to California for the winter."

"Thet's good," replied Day. "The winters are bad some seasons. Winter don't come, though, till late December."

"That's splendid news. Now, Day, you encourage me to ask questions. Can you put me on to some crack Arizona cowboys? I'll keep Raidy and perhaps another of my riders, and send the others home."

"You'll have no trouble hirin' the best men out heah, because you can pay better wages."

"But how am I to know riders who are honest, not to mention other qualifications?"

"Son, you're shore askin' me a question thet even Franklidge, the boss rancher of this country, cain't answer. I'm sorry to have to confess thet. But the honest Gawd's truth is this—nobody heah knows who's a rustler an' who's not."

"Good Heavens! Day, you don't mean that!" cried Ben, shocked.

"Wal, I shore do. I'm a square cattleman. I've branded calves in my day thet wasn't mine an' I knowed they wasn't. Every rancher has done thet, an' few there are in this neck of the woods who don't do it now. But I don't. There are ranchers heah who suspect me, same as I suspect them. For this reason: rustlin' cattle is a mighty big business along the three hundred miles of Mogollon range. The country grazes hundreds of thousands of cattle. They reckon Franklidge alone has a hundred thousand haid. Wal, it's great pickin' fer the rustlers. There's the Hash Knife gang, heah fer many years. There's the Pine Tree outfit, which is newer an' wuss. An' no *honest* rancher can name the leader of thet outfit. He's shore some one of us ranchers, shore as hell. Then there's a host

of lesser rustlers. Thet, Ide, is the country you've come to ranch in."

"Well, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" ejaculated Ben.

"Shore you are. How many cattle did Burridge sell you?"

"Ten thousand head," replied Ben. "I took his word. But at the same time I figured if he was a thousand head or so shy I'd be satisfied."

"Wal, you figgered good, but not good enough," said Day gruffly. "Never take no man's word for a count of cattle. You want to see them brands. Burridge, now, had half a dozen brands, but he never had no ten thousand, nor eight thousand, nor—nobody could ever tell how many haid he ran. He was always sellin' cattle."

"What do you think of Burridge failing to make a count for me? He promised to do so at once."

"Wal, I don't like to say what I think. But if Burridge shows up soon an' makes a count, it'll be a good deal more than I have any idee he'll do."

"He'll not come," said Ben decidedly. "Day, Burridge has cheated me."

"Wal, don't you say thet to anyone else around heah," warned Day. "Be careful *what* you say, Ide. An' make your men keep their mouths shut. I'll let you have two of my boys, an' I can get you another. For all I know they're square, an' they're shore hard-ridin' an' hard-shootin' punchers."

"That's good of you, Day," responded Ben with gratitude. "I may be able to do you a favor now and then, since we're neighbors."

"I'm wonderin' about somethin'. Shore Burridge didn't tell you thet I had a four-thousand-dollar lien on his cattle?"

"No, he sure didn't," returned Ben.

"Wal, I have. Soon after he come heah, about four years ago, I lent him the money. He paid interest for a while, then he quit, a'n I was after him pretty hard when he sold out to you."

"That's bad news, Day," said Ben soberly.

"Wal, I reckon, but don't let it worry you none, so far as I'm concerned. But there's wuss. The Hatts also have a lien on Burridge's stock."

"Well, well! this is getting thick. Who are the Hatts?"

"Father an' three sons. There's a girl, too, pretty young lass, the only decent one of a bad lot. They're bad woodsmen an' live back in the brakes. Fact is all the rustlers an' outlaws hole up in these brakes, which are rough canyons runnin' down from the Mogollons. Rough they are, the hardest goin' in Arizona. It used to be Apache country."

"So Burridge palmed his debts off on me? Damn him! What's the law in such a case as this?"

"Wal, I've knowed it to come up in court more'n once. An' the buyer had to settle. You see, Burridge's property wasn't really his to sell."

"I appreciate that. I should have taken time to inquire. But what the devil shall I do, Day? I don't mean about the liens. I'll have to settle them, soon as they are proven. But how many cattle do I actually own? Where are they? How will I go about safeguarding what I do own?"

"Son, the Lord himself couldn't answer them questions," replied the rancher, with his booming laugh. "But I reckon the case ain't so bad thet we'll have to take to drink aboot it. I'll ride over with these boys I'm gettin' you, say week today. Meanwhile I'll do a lot of thinkin'. We'll get your men an' we'll all put our haids together."

"Thank you very much, Day," rejoined Ben, most gratefully. "It's sure lucky for me that you came over."

"Wal, mebbe it's lucky fer me, too," said Day. "One more hunch before I go, an' I shore must be rustlin' home. There'll be other ranchers callin' on you, an' some of them will talk deals. Go slow. Don't offend, but don't go in anythin' without consultin' me."

"By George! you needn't caution me about that," returned Ben. "I'm too scared. Why, my wife and sister will have a fit when they find out how Burridge fooled me!"

"Wal, my advice is, don't tell your wimminfolks. What they don't know shore won't hurt them."

"But I should tell you my sister Hettie is in on this deal with me. She wanted a half interest, but I let her have only one third. Thank goodness!"

"Thet big-eyed lass! She must have a lot of money."

"Hettie is well off, yes."

"Wal, wal! Thet lass—handsome an' rich! Golly! Some cowpuncher is shore goin' to fall into heaven. I wish I was a youngster. Reckon as it is I'll have to pick out the best feller heahaboots fer her."

"I'm advising *you* now," laughed Ben. "Don't try that with Hettie, if you want her to like you."

"Thanks fer the hunch, Ide. Wal, I said before I must be goin', an' heah I am yet."

"There's one thing—I—nearly forgot," said Ben, with hesitation. "You must know everybody in Arizona?"

"Lord, no, son! Why, Arizona is most as big as the rest of the United States! But I'm pretty well acquainted all through heah."

"Did you ever know or hear of a—a fellow who—who went by the name of —Nevada?"

"Nevada?" queried Day thoughtfully.

"Yes, Nevada. It was a nickname, of course. I never knew his—this fellow's other name."

"Humph! Nevada? No, I never heerd thet handle on a feller in my life. I've knowed a heap of Arizonie's in my time, an' Texas Jacks, an' Colorado somethin's or other. But no Nevada."

Chapter Eight

"Who in Hell are You?"

SOME eighteen or twenty miles from Tom Day's ranch, Judge Franklidge maintained the last outpost of his extensive cattle range south of the railroad toward the Mogollons.

This property was called the Chevelon Ranch. The hundred and sixty acres which comprised the ranch lay in a strip along the rim of Chevelon Canyon, one of the deep wild gorges that constituted part of the brakes of the Mogollons.

Cabins and corrals, built of logs, showed the weathering of years of storm and heat. The main cabin stood on the rim, and the wide porch ran to the edge of the gray rock wall. On this mid-August afternoon the porch was a shady and cool place to lounge and rest. Judge Franklidge had just arrived on one of his rare visits. The long hot dusty ride out from Winthrop had tired him, and with a great sigh of content he sank into one of the comfortable seats on the porch.

This ranch was a favorite with

Franklidge, owing to its wild beauty and solitude and the abundance of deer and turkey that ranged the forests.

I'll invite young Ide to hunt with me in October, he soliloquized. *Fine chap that. Too bad about the rotten deal he fell into here. It sure doesn't speak well for Arizona. And what a lovely girl that sister of his! If I were younger now . . .*

The judge fell into a daydream that amused as well as made him sigh. Presently a jangle of spurs and thud of footsteps interrupted his reverie, and he looked up to see Tom Day and one of his own cowboys approaching. Day had his hand on the younger man's shoulder and was talking earnestly.

"Howdy, Judge! I'm shore glad to see you," said Day, as he heavily mounted the porch.

"How are you, Tom? Pull up that bench. We're in for a good long talk."

"Wal, it's aboot time," returned Day, as he deposited his huge bulk on a seat.

The judge laughed, and then glanced sharply at the cowboy waiting at the step.

"Texas Jack, you've got something on your mind," he said.

"Yes, sir, but it can wait. No hurry, sir," replied the cowboy hastily.

"Come up and sit in with us, Jack," was Franklidge's reply.

The cowboy did as he was bidden. The judge's appraising eyes took stock of the lithe figure, the service-worn garb, the lean bearded face that was half hidden under the wide sombrero.

"Stewart was in town last night, drunk," spoke Franklidge casually. "Is he here today?"

"Yes, sir—an' he's all right now," rejoined the cowboy.

"Judge, your foreman *may* be all right, as Texas Jack says, but I've my doubts," put in Day. "I cain't find anythin' ag'in him, 'cept the drinkin'. But I've just come to distrust the man."

"Mr. Franklidge, I hunted up Stewart, an' found him an Dillon off under a cedar, talkin' deep an' quiet," said Texas Jack.

"Dillon? Who's he?"

"Dillon is young Ben Ide's foreman," replied Day with interest. "He's held jobs all over the range the last two years. Fine cowman. Engagin' sort of chap. Everybody likes him. I shore do."

"Which ought to be recommendation enough for Ide or even me. Well, Tom, have you considered the offer I made you some time ago?"

"Reckon I have, an' I'm acceptin' with thanks," replied Day heartily. "Heah's my hand, Judge."

"We're partners, then," replied Franklidge, as he shook the proffered hand. "We'll throw these ranches and all the stock together. Now get what's troubling you off your chest."

"Wal, Boss, the situation heah has grown from bad to wuss," returned Day seriously.

"Where do you mean by here?"

"All this range thet haids along the wild brakes of the Mogollons. Say, fifty miles in a straight line. Reckon it takes in a good many ranches, countin' everybody, an' mebbe two hundred thousand haid of cattle. But Ben Ide's range an' this one of yours an' mine have come in fer the wust of the rustlin' this last month."

"We've always had rustlers to deal with. We always will have. What's the difference between say a year or five years ago and now?"

"Wal, Judge, the difference I'd calkilate offhand to stand you an' me an'

Ben Ide around ten thousand haid."

The judge's boots came down off the porch rail with a crash. "What?" he demanded incredulously.

"Boss, I said ten thousand, an' mebbe thet's conservative. Shore most of this rustled stock belongs to Ide. You see, Ide proved an easy mark. He bought out Burridge, who had some stock, nobody knows how much. Wal, young Ide's cow outfit was green an' raw for Arizona. I gave him two of my best riders. One of them, Sam Tull, was found daid in the woods. Shot! We've never found out aboot it. The other cowboy, Rang Jones, had a quarrel with Dillon an' quit."

"So they've hit young Ide hard," muttered Franklidge indignantly. "I have seen something of him lately. He didn't complain to me."

"Ide's not thet kind, Judge," replied Day warmly. "He's as game as they come. An' his sister—say, she's a thoroughbred. She stands to lose 'most as much as Ide."

"Tom, I admire Miss Ide very much indeed, and her brother, too," responded the judge. "I regret exceedingly the reception Arizona has given these two fine young people. We must end this damned wholesale cattle-stealing."

"Ahuh! Boss, I reckon I feel it more than you, as I've come to be friends with the Ides. Why, he paid Burridge's debt to me. Four thousand! An' then I'm a son-of-a-gun if he didn't send for Elam Hatt an' pay the lien he had on Burridge. Don't know how much. But the Hatts were drunk fer a week. Ever since then the rustlers have been bolder than I ever seen them yet in Arizonie."

"Who are these rustlers, Tom?"

"Huh! If I said what I think it'd be old to you. But I reckon there is a new leader workin' now. Some big thief who's keen as a wolf."

"Tom, the Hatts are a bad outfit," rejoined the Judge thoughtfully. "The Stillwells are another. Surely these backwoodsmen run with these rustler outfits."

"Shore they do," snorted Day. "But I reckon the Hatts ain't the ringleaders. Cedar Hatt is the wust of thet bad lot. Bad *hombre* with guns! Ever' once in a while I heah of some shootin' scrapé he's been in out there, among his own kind."

"Cedar Hatt?" mused the Judge. "Yes, I know of him. Bad name—How many Hatts in the family?"

"I know the whole outfit," replied Day. "Elam an' me always got along pretty good. But I've no use fer Cedar. He's the eldest son. Then there's Henny an' Tobe—pack rats if I ever seen any in the woods. An' last there's a girl—Rose. Reckon she'll be aboot sixteen. Pretty slip of a lass, whose mother died when she was a baby."

"What a pity! No mother. No decent home. No schooling. Why don't some cowboy take this Rose away and marry her? She might turn out a good woman."

"Shore she might. An' so I've said often. But I ain't hit on any cowboy yet who cared to risk his skin down there in the brakes."

"What has Ide done in regard to the raids on his stock?" asked the judge curiously.

"Aboot all any man could," replied Day admiringly. "He has spent a lot of money hiring extra hands to trail stock. He took over this Dillon at a high salary. Funny aboot Ben Ide, though. He gets sore when the rustlers make a raid. But he really don't care a damn aboot the cattle. He's shore

afraid fer his horses, though, 'specially thet California Red. There's a grand hoss, Judge. I'll bet if the rustlers got thet stallion Ben Ide would hit the trail himself. I'm just gettin' acquainted with him. He always struck me as a rancher whose heart wasn't in his ranch. There's somethin' he wants. I cain't explain what I don't savvy. But I've a hunch young Ide has been hurt. Mebbe he killed someone over in California an' had to get out. Then it might be he's *lookin'* fer some man. Like a Texan, you know, who never *forgot.*"

Before the judge could reply, the cowboy, Texas Jack, whirled round with a silent wrestling violence that indicated a suppressed and poignant passion. His eyes gleamed like clear coals of fire.

"I'm—heahin'—all—you say!" he burst out.

"Suppose you are, Jack?" queried the judge in kindly surprise. "If I'd minded about being overheard I'd have sent you away."

Tom Day stared. "Wal, what the hell ails you, son?" he growled.

Jack whirled away in the same sudden violent action with which he had faced them, only now it seemed there was added a fierce struggle of mind over body. He bent over the rail. He sprang up erect and rigid. In a moment more he turned toward the men again, to present a remarkably transformed front.

"Tom, I reckon I happened to hit on a way to fix the rustlers," replied Jack nonchalantly.

Judge Franklidge sat up with a jerk, but his smile robbed his action of a convincing sincerity.

"Jack, we'd be grateful for any suggestions from one as well proven as you on the range."

"Shore it's as simple as a-b-c, "rejoined the cowboy blandly. "Somebody has got to ride down into the brakes an' get thick with the rustlers. Somebody has got to shoot up the Hatts an' mebbe the Stillwells. An' kill some of that Pine Tree outfit—in particular the *hombre* who's at the haid of it."

"Is *thet* all? My Gawd! Jack, I shore thought you'd hit on somethin' hard to pull off," returned Day.

"Shore it'd be hard enough," admitted Texas Jack, who refused to see the ridicule.

"Hard! Why, cowboy, you're loco!" exploded the other. "Shore you hit on the way to fix the rustlers. But who'n hell's goin' to do it? Was you figurin' on us hirin' some fancy gun slingers to do the little job? Mebbe you had in mind some new Billy the Kid? Or more like, perhaps, Jim Lacy, who they say has been hidin' quiet in Arioznle for a long time!"

Texas Jack's tan appeared to become a shade less brown. "Tom Day, how long have you known me?" he demanded.

"Two years an' more, son."

"Would you trust me?"

"I shore would. With my stock, my money, my reputation—with my life—so help me Gawd!"

"Judge Franklidge, how long have I worked for you?" queried the cowboy.

"About a year and a half, as I remember."

"An' you'd trust me?"

"As well as I would my own flesh and blood."

Texas Jack removed his sombrero and sailed it against the wall. His brow was broad and pale, his clear light eyes seemed to burn with a steady flame;

under the thin bronze beard, cheeks and lips set hard.

"Wal, then, it's my job to fix the rustlers," he said deliberately.

"You! That's nonsense!" declared the judge. "You wouldn't tackle that alone?"

"It's got to be done alone. Listen," went on Jack, bending to his hearers. "I've got to become a rustler. I may have to go a long way to find the leader of this heah Pine Tree outfit. I'll have to drink an' steal an' kill. Shore I may lose my life finishin' the job. An' I want my secret kept till it's ended. Then if I come back alive I want my name cleared."

"Who'n hell *are* you?" asked Day.

"Man, you're forcing me against my will," said the judge, rising to his feet. "I don't want you to attempt this thing alone. You'd only be killed. But I admire you, Jack."

"Dead or alive, I want my name cleared!" exclaimed the cowboy.

"Of what?"

"Of the stealin' an' lyin' I'll have to do. I want your word of honor to keep my secret, an', if I come back alive, to clear my name."

"Jack, are you going to persist in this mad plan?" demanded the judge.

"Reckon I shore will, whether you stand by me or not," returned the other grimly. "It's too late now. I've got a reason, Judge. But it'd only be fair for you to uphold me—to tell in court, if necessary, that you an' Tom Day were parties to the job I undertook."

"Jack," replied Franklidge, "you have my word. And here's my hand."

Texas Jack broke from that strong, earnest handclasp to make the same proffer to the other rancher.

"Tom, will you stand by me—when I come back?"

"Hell, yes," boomed Day as he pumped the cowboy's arm up and down.

Abruptly Jack wrenched clear of the vigorous grasp and wheeled to a post of the porch, against which he leaned and clutched hard. Something long buried was being resurrected. Ignominy loomed out of the past to stain an honest name. Whatever the strife was, it passed as swiftly as it had come. Then the cowboy turned again, somehow different, so that the judge and Day had awe added to their surprise.

"Gentlemen, I shore hate to give myself away," he drawled. "But I reckon it's got to be done."

"Wal now, just who'n hell are you, anyhow?" queried Day as the other paused.

"Tom Day, the starved cowboy you once took pity on happens to be Jim Lacy!"

Chapter Nine

"I've Prayed for Someone."

JIM LACY rode briskly down a trail that led into the cedars. He had taken his own saddle, but the horse he bestrode was one long discarded by the boys at the ranch. Once under cover of the cedars, the rider pulled his mount to a walk. It was nineteen miles to Sunshine, and he wanted to reach that station after dark and board a night train without being seen.

A melancholy resignation had no power to cramp the slow-mounting exaltation in Jim Lacy's breast. Once free of the need to hurry, his mind reverted to the cause of this extraordinary adventure he had voluntarily accepted. Facts were cold, hard things.

He had hidden his real identity; he had buried the past; he had risen on stepping-stones of his dead self to honest useful service; he had earned peace and victory, if not real happiness; and then, like a thunderbolt from heaven, an inevitable, irrestible fate had confronted him.

"Aw, I shore knew it—all these weeks I knew," whispered Jim huskily. "Ben come to Arizona to find me! Didn't he comb California—didn't he send men to all the ranges in the West? Didn't Tom Day tell me no more'n a month ago—how Ben Ide wanted to know if he'd ever met a cowboy called Nevada? He never forgot. An' at last he come to this wild land."

How terribly sweet and soul-satisfying that knowledge, and yet somehow bitter! In one tremendous moment of decision it had flung him back into the past, once more to own to an infamous name. It had destroyed all he had built up. Only through the power of his dreaded name could he ever bring to successful issue the task he had set himself. What irony of fate that the fame he hated must be his own sesame to the rendezvous of the rustlers who were ruining Ben Ide!

"Like as not in the long run I'll stop a bullet," he muttered, harsh in his agitation. "But hardly before I get the job 'most done. An' shore that'd be better so. Ben would never know I am Jim Lacy. An' Hettie—she would never know. But I reckon that's not my kind of luck. Like as not I'll run plumb into Ben before it's over. An' Hettie, too!"

He rode on through the hot waning afternoon, absorbed with the strife of his soul. When darkness fell he had reached the outskirts of Sunshine, and he halted under a clump of cottonwoods. Here, removing saddle and bridle from the horse, he turned it loose. That act seemed to sever the last thread which bound him to the ranching life he had followed for long. Wherefore he sat down beside his saddle and pack, and with bowed head and rending of his spirit, he slipped, as into a long-unused garment, back into the old personality. And it seemed that his plan for the perilous adventure at hand was simple and complete. He had only to be Jim Lacy.

The whistle of an approaching freight train inspired him with an idea. He would steal a ride on the freight, thus obviating any risk of being recognized at the station. To this end he shouldered his pack and saddle and, hurrying to the railroad track, he waited beside the slowly halting train, peering through the gloom for an empty car. At length it reached him, just as the train stopped. Jim hurriedly threw his pack and his saddle aboard and climbed in.

Daylight found him across the Territory line, in New Mexico. When the train stopped outside of a town at a water tank, he threw his baggage out, down over a grassy embankment, and got off. He had some money, beside the considerable sum Judge Franklidge had forced him to take. And it was with something of an old familiar zest that he strolled into the town.

Before encountering any riders or cattlemen Jim entered a barber shop, from which he emerged a changed man. Next he purchased a complete new outfit of rider's apparel, the costliest he could find. He retained only his gun and chaps, which were things more intimate than clothes and were not to be discarded.

His next move was to buy a good

horse. This turned out to be easier than he had anticipated. Lastly he led the horse out of town, found his saddle and pack, and soon he was riding back across the line into Arizona.

Traveling leisurely, Jim Lacy in due time arrived in Winthrop.

The day was a Friday, toward the close of afternoon. He made his way to Beacham's corrals, where overnight visitors to town usually left their horses to be cared for. Several rangy, dusty-garbed riders had just ridden in, evidently behind a dilapidated old wagon drawn by a shaggy gaunt team. The driver, a lanky man, dark of face and bearded, clambered down with the cramped movements of one more at home in the saddle. There was a young girl sitting on the driver's seat, and she appeared quite pretty, in a wild-rose way. Jim's quick eye also took in the stock of a rifle projecting from the side of the seat.

Jim led his horse somewhat closer to the wagon, and choosing one of the covered stalls adjoining the fence, he leisurely began to remove the saddle, while his eyes roved elsewhere. He noted presently, when the girl jumped down, that her slim brown legs were bare, that she wore beaded moccasins, and the rest of her apparel showed further indications of the backwoods.

"Shore, I'll bet that'll be Elam Hatt an' his daughter Rose," muttered Jim. "An' if so, those three riders are the other Hatts. Reckon the ball is openin' *pronto*."

By the time Jim had turned his horse over to the Mexican stable boy the Hatts had gone into town. Jim got out just in time to see them turn a corner. He followed very slowly, not reluctantly, but ponderingly. He passed several persons whom he knew well, They did not give him a second glance.

Jim idled along, halting to gaze into windows, leaned against doorways here and there, watching the people. Presently he came to the entrance of a store and espied the girl he had taken for Rose Hatt standing in the door. She had a package under her arm and was evidently waiting for someone.

"Excuse me, miss," said Jim, doffing his sombrero. "Don't I know you?"

She looked up at him with big hazel eyes that had not been long free of tears. "You might, mister, but I sure don't know you."

Jim decided she was not such a child as he had first supposed. She had wavy brown hair, rather rebellious, red lips, and tanned rose-tinted cheeks.

"Aren't you Rose Hatt?" he asked.

"Sure."

Jim leaned easily against the doorpost, smiling down upon her. "Reckon I thought so. Shore there's not many girls as pretty as you in these parts."

"Put your hat back on, mister," she replied tartly. "Standin' bareheaded don't go with such taffy. Besides, I ain't used to it."

"All right," returned Jim good-humoredly. "Bad habit of mine. I'll get sunstruck some day."

"Say, you'll ketch worse if my dad comes along," she said, laughing. "Onless you tell me *pronto* who you are."

"Wal, Rose, I might be Samuel Snoozegazzer," drawled Jim.

"Only you ain't," she added with interest, and she looked Jim over from boots to sombrero.

"I'll tell you my name if I drop in on the dance tonight," he said.

"Mister, I knowed that was comin'," she returned. "An' I'll bet you never met me before. But I'm afeared I can't promise to dance with you."

"Why not?"

"Dad says I can go, but Cedar—he's my brother—he says no. An' Cedar is boss of our outfit."

"Wal, if your dad's willin', why, go ahaid. He's your father."

"Say, mister, I reckon you ain't acquainted with Cedar Hatt," declared the girl, almost with scorn. "You're sure a stranger in these parts."

"Yes, I am, sorry to say," replied Jim thoughtfully. "But what's so bad aboot your brother?"

"Cedar's just plain cactus an' sidewinder rattlesnake mixed up with hell."

"Aw, that's a terrible thing to call a brother," rejoined Jim.

"He's only a half-brother, same as Henny an' Tobe."

"Oh, I see! Your dad was married twice an' your ma was the second."

The girl's eyes grew somber and her red lips curled with bitterness. "They're some folks out in the brakes who say my dad wasn't never married no second time."

"Shore he was, lass. Don't believe gossip of low-down people. An' don't be so hard on your brother Cedar."

"I hate him," she burst out with passion. "It was his fault that Clan Dillon took to runnin' after me."

"*Dillon!*" flashed Jim, in complete amazement.

His tone, his look betrayed to the simple passionate girl that she had allowed her tongue too much freedom.

"Say, mister, here I am talkin' like an old woman," she cried, almost in affright. "I'm beggin' you to keep mum that slip of my tongue. Cedar would half kill me."

"Shore I will," returned Jim. "Rose, you just happened to run into a man you can trust."

"You sure look it, mister. And I like you."

"Thanks. I'm shore the lucky *hombre*. But I reckon now you're engaged to marry this Clan Dillon."

"Marry, hell!" she exclaimed suddenly almost fierce again. "I wouldn't marry *him* to save his life, the handsome, smilin'-faced liar. Not even if he wanted to, which he sure don't. I'd be only a sheepskin rug to Clan Dillon."

Jim looked at the girl. She was recovering composure. Manifestly she was a primitive little girl, as much like a wildcat as a wild rose. Jim felt intuitively that she was good. The flame left her hazel eyes and the hardness around her lips softened.

"Rose, have you any friends?" he asked earnestly. "Shore I mean womenfolks who could advise a young girl like you."

"Me? Why, mister, didn't I tell you I lived down in the brakes?"

"Haven't you a man friend, then, or even a boy—who's good?"

"No. But I was makin' one fast enough," she replied, both with resentment and mischievousness in face and voice. "A boy from California! Say he was nice. But Cedar caught me with him."

"Too bad. What'd Cedar do, now?" queried Jim, much concerned.

"Not much, for Cedar," replied the girl demurely. "He drove my boy friend off into the woods, dodgin' bullets! An' he kicked me till I couldn't set down for days."

"Wal! Look heah, girl, you're old

enough an' you've sense enough to know a friend when you meet him, aren't you?"

"Mister, I think so. But I—I'm afraid to trust myself," she faltered, swayed by his earnestness.

"Wal, you needn't be in my case. I'm going to trust you."

"How?" she asked wonderingly.

"I'll tell you presently. Now who's this California boy your brother caught you with?"

"Swear you'll never tell?"

"Rose, I'll shore keep your secret, an' more. I'll help you to *make* a friend of him."

"Oh, mister, if that could be!" she cried rapturously.

"Hurry. I see your dad comin' down the street."

"His name is Marvie Blaine," she whispered.

Jim Lacy drew a sharp swift breath. He leaned down to the girl.

"Listen," he whispered. "I will be your friend—an' this boy's—if you'll keep your mouth shut."

"Lord, mister, you needn't be afeared of *me*. I wouldn't dare. Sure I don't know why I ever talked to you. But you're different. An' oh! how I need someone to talk to!"

"Shore you've found someone. Me! I'll be goin' down into the brakes."

"But who are you, mister?"

"Did you ever heah of Jim Lacy?"

Her red lips parted to let out a little gasp and her brown face paled. "My Heavens—are you him?"

"Yes."

"Hear of you, Mister Jim Lacy!" she ejaculated, her eyes dilating. "Ever since I can remember I've heerd of you. Many men ride to my dad's ranch, an' none but they speak your name. Some of them had seen you, an' two of them at least knowed you once."

"Rose. I'll tell you their names—Hardy Rue an' Cash Burridge."

"Yes—yes. Oh, you *are* Jim Lacy. An' —an' I'm not scared a bit. Why, it ain't so long ago that I heerd Cash Burridge tell of seein' you call out an' kill a man for beatin' a girl. Oh, Mister Lacy, no one ever taught me about God, but I've prayed—prayed night after night —for someone to come an'—"

"That your dad right heah?" interrupted Jim.

"Oh yes—what'll I say?"

"Nothin', lass. He hasn't seen us. Don't forget. Keep mum. Good-by."

Jim strode out as if he were just leaving the store.

Wal, wal! The old luck of Jim Lacy! Half an hour in Winthrop an' I'm on a hot trail.

Marvie Blaine! Marvie—the boy who had worhsipped him and Ben Ide in those wonderful Forlorn River days! Jim had found the boy way over here in Arizona. Marvie would be eighteen now—quite a man as cowboys were rated on the ranges.

Jim went to a side-street restaurant to get his supper and engage lodgings for the night. As darkness came on he ventured into a store, where he made a few purchases, and then he returned to the corral for his pack. This he carried to his room.

Reckon that'll be aboot all, he soliloquized, as he stood gazing around the dingy bare room.

He was thinking that he had walked the streets of Winthrop about the last time as an unknown man whom few people had noticed. Those swift moments had seemed singularly sweet to Jim.

Wal, I'm shore ready to pay all it'll take.

Chapter Ten

Old Acquaintance

DURING the early-evening hours Jim Lacy visited some of the main street saloons, steering clear of the Ace High and others of prominence. He lounged about the bars and tables, friendly to anyone who wanted to talk, willing to buy cigars and drinks, while he made some excuse or other for not indulging. Cowboys were friendly. Gamblers and hangers-on, Mexicans and Indians, attracted by Jim's liberality and presence, added their little to the sum of information he was gathering.

"I'm lookin' for a pard," Jim would say to most everyone he met. "A cowboy who broke jail over in New Mexico." And then he went on with more of such fabrication, always to conclude with questions.

Cowboys under the influence of a few strong drinks soon acquainted him with range gossip he had not heard. Several habitues of these dives accepted Jim's advances without telling him anything. These, of course, were the men who knew most and required cultivation. But they only eyed him covertly. Bartenders were mostly procurers for this or that gambling-house, and from them he amassed much information. At length he left the last resort, intending to hunt up the dance hall.

Shore, that wasn't so bad for a start, mused Jim as he summed up and sifted the bits of talk in which he found significance. *Cash Burridge, sold out an' gamblin' his fortune away, spends half his time heah in town. Thick with some Spanish girl. Same old Cash! Clan Dillon one grand* hombre, *eh? Wal, wal! The Ides rich Californians who're bein' rustled an' sheeped off their range. Tom Day just as liable to be boss of the Pine Tree outfit as anyone. That'll shore tickle Tom. The Hatt outfit, except Cedar, just no-good homesteaders, low-down enough for anythin' not really big an' dangerous. Cedar Hatt, though, is a plumb bad man. Not the even-break kind, but crafty as a redskin, treacherous as a greaser. The Stillwells hardest nuts down in the brakes. Never come to town! Now that's shore worth rememberin'. Last an' perhaps meanin' most to me—what that half-drunk sheepherder told me. Strange riders often seen by herders passin' through the Mogollons. Wal, most of all this sounds familiar, as I think back. But now it comes close.*

Jim soon found where the dance was being held. It was out a side street, almost at the edge of town, in a low wide adobe building, very picturesque now with its hanging colored lanterns. Outside there was a crowd of Mexicans, Indians, white men in rough garb, noisy boys, all looking in through the archways at the couples walking down the long patio and the dancers inside, swaying to and fro with the music. There was something of the spirit of a *fiesta* in the air.

Upon entering the place Jim was aware that he came under the scrutiny of men who evidently were conducting the dance, or at least overseeing those who entered. One of these was Macklin, the sheriff of Winthrop, an officer who arrested cowboys sometimes, and Indians and Mexicans, but who never had been known to jail a gambler or one of the more dangerous characters. Jim, however, was not questioned. He

strolled up the wide steps to watch the dancers, and then moving from one vantage point to another, he at length found a place that suited him, where he sat down to watch and listen.

Among the dancers, and promenaders in the patio, there were a number of dark-haired, flower-decorated Mexican girls, very bright and pretty in their festal array. It was indeed a gala occasion, full of color and life, and soft laughter and Spanish music. Jim had to admit that his calculations had fallen awry in this case. Rose Hatt might be in attendance, but it was a safe wager that Cedar Hatt would not be admitted, nor any of the men Jim wanted to watch, unless it might be Dillon. He, surely, would not only be welcome, but very probably the lion of the dance.

Presently Jim believed he had caught a glimpse of little Rose Hatt at the far end of the patio. So he arose to walk in that direction, and found it rather a running of the gantlet, for as the music started up couples began gayly to hasten to the dancing-floor.

It was indeed Rose, and a transformed little girl, too. She had on a gaudy, cheap, flimsy dress, with shoes and stockings to match, but these did not detract from her prettiness. She was young and radiant. Her partner was a cowboy not much older than herself.

Jim watched the couple until they were lost in the whirl of dancers. This end of the patio opened into a garden where a walk wound between clumps of shrubbery. There were benches here and there, and some of these were overshadowed by vines. Jim watched the dancers, hoping to see Rose again, and perhaps catch her eye. But he missed her in the whirling throng, and when the dance ended he retreated to a seat on the adobe wall.

Presently a couple approached out of the shadow. As they reached a point beyond, yet near where Jim sat, half concealed, the girl halted.

"Please—let's go outside," begged the man.

His voice prompted Jim to turn so that he could see better. The fellow had the build of a rider, lithe, tall, wide in the shoulders. He wore a dark suit and had a flower in the lapel of his coat. His face had a compelling attraction.

"No, Mr. Dillon, I don't care to go farther," said the girl.

Jim started so violently that he almost fell off the low adobe wall. That voice! He would have known it among a thousand voices. His glance leaped from the man to his companion. She stood full in the soft rose light of one of the colored lanterns. Hettie Ide! His heart bounded, then seemed to become locked with a terrible pang. It was Hettie, grown into a woman. The face that had haunted Jim's campfires in the lonely watches of the nights! The same rippling fair hair, the deep earnest eyes, the rich clear complexion, the strong full lips, more hauntingly sweet than ever for the sadness which had come!

"Mr. Dillon," she was saying, "the reason I can't marry you is that I don't love you."

"But, Hettie, you will—you must love me in time," he returned passionately, seizing her hand and trying to pull her into the shadow. She resisted, broke away from him.

"I never will," she said, with eyes and cheeks flaming. "What kind of a man are you—that you persist so rudely? I liked you—even admired you un-

til you forced such attentions as these on me. I've overlooked them because my brother Ben thinks so much of you. But no more, Mr. Dillon."

Her dignified yet spirited reply might as well not have been spoken, for all the effect it had to restrain Dillon. He burst into low impassioned appeal, and he backed her under the overhanging vines against the wall. Dillon was no young cowboy, mad with love. He appeared to be a man, masterful, adept at making love, absolutely indifferent to anything but his own desires.

"I—I thought you were a gentleman!"

"No man thinks of bein' over-gentle when he's in love," retorted Dillon. "I tried that with you. And to tell you the truth, I wasn't so natural then as I am now. I've plumb lost my head. I tell you I love you an' I'm goin' to have you. What do you say to that?"

"I say this, Mr. Dillon, we've all got you figured wrong," she retorted.

"Sure you have," he rejoined, with an exultant laugh. "An' here's how!" With that he attempted to seize her in his arms. But he had evidently cornered the wrong girl. Supple and strong, she wrestled free in an instant and wheeled away from the wall.

"What do you—think—Ben will do—when I tell him—you've insulted me?" she panted, backing into the aisle.

"If you've got any sense you won't tell him," replied Dillon, in a flash changing from an ardent lover to something almost menacing. "Ben Ide's in bad here. Arizona isn't California. There are rustlers here an' you can bet some of them are the ranchers he thinks his friends. I know these men. He's lost most of his stock. If he buys in more he'll lose that too. Hettie, I'm the only cowman in Arizona who can save him from ruin."

"Indeed! Are you aware that I have a share in the Ide ranch?" retorted Hettie sarcastically.

"I've heard so, but I didn't believe."

"Well, it's true. I own one-third of the land and the stock. Besides, I have my own house apart from Ben."

"That's news to me," said Dillon. "But it sure makes my case stronger. What ruins Ben Ide will ruin you."

"The loss of a few thousand cattle won't hurt either my brother or me," she returned, almost flippantly, studying his face with steady, penetrating eyes. She was seeing the man as if he had suddenly unmasked.

"You must be pretty rich to talk like that," replied Dillon.

"Quite well off, thank you. I often wondered if that didn't interest you, and now I know."

"Thanks, you're very smart," he said. "But I'd be crazy about you if you were as poor as Rose Hatt. I tell you I love you—want you—need you so terribly that if I fail to get you it'll make a devil out of me."

"I'm beginning to imagine the process of *making* has progressed very far already."

"You've got cat in you—same as other women," he retorted. "Listen, if you'll marry me I'll save Ben Ide. If you won't I'll quit him an' use my influence all over the range. I'll make ranchin' impossible for him in this country. An' I'll get *you* in the bargain."

Hettie Ide turned so pale that her eyes shone black.

"Mr. Clan Dillon! Popular fellow! Best and squarest foreman in Arizona!" she exclaimed with amazed and infinite scorn.

Dillon made a deprecatory gesture.

"Mr. Dillon, when you first came to us and began your—your attentions to me, I thought there was something queer about you," went on Hettie. "You were too good to be true, as old Raidy said. Well, I think you're as bad as you seemed good. I think you're a contemptible, conceited ass. I think you're a deep, cunning scoundrel. You need not return to Cedar Springs tomorrow. Marvie Blaine will drive me home."

"What do you mean?" demanded Dillon.

"You'll not get a chance to quit Ben. Right here and now you are discharged."

"Me! What? You're loco, girl. Ben Ide wouldn't listen to you. He can't run that ranch without me. Haven't you sense enough to see it?"

Hettie Ide abruptly turned her back upon Dillon and walked away, to disappear in the crowd of dancers.

"—damn the luck!" muttered Dillon. He lighted a cigarette and stood thoughtfully inhaling and expelling smoke.

Jim Lacy strode out from the shadow. "Howdy, Dillon!"

A lightning-swift glance took Jim in from head to feet and back again.

"Howdy, yourself. Reckon you've got the best of me," returned Dillon gruffly. "Who are you?"

"I might be Peter Punkins—only I ain't."

"Pretty smart, aren't you?" rejoined Dillon, feeling his way. "Reckon you're more Simple Simon than Peter Punkins. I don't care. But I'm curious about where you just sprung from."

"Wal, I hail from New Mexico."

"The hell you do!" flashed Dillon. "That's nothin' to me. But where'd you come from just now?"

"Dillon, you're figurin' quick," returned Jim, in slow deliberation. "Wal, I was settin' right heah on the adobe wall." He pointed to the spot in the shadow.

The man cursed under his breath and flung his cigarette down.

"You set there watchin'—listenin'?" he demanded, with sudden and powerful self-control.

"Shore did," drawled Jim.

"Stranger, where I come from men got shot for such offense."

"I reckon. That's why I'm not apologizin'."

Dillon seemed to accept this as confirmation of the suspicion which had evidently been growing with his thoughts. Abruptly his bullying manner changed. He stood unmasked, as far as his pretense was concerned. Cautious, steady, cold, and hard he stood a moment, his strange green eye trying to pierce Jim's mind.

As for Jim, he measured Dillon to be a Westerner vastly different from the character he enjoyed in that section of Arizona. Jim did not recognize a kindred spirit, but he read in Dillon the depth, the courage, the desperate experience of a man used to the rawest and deadliest of frontier life.

"Ha! I see you pack a gun, stranger," coolly remarked Dillon. "Reckon you see I don't?"

"Shore. I seen first off you didn't, an' then just now I read it in your eyes."

"Mind-reader, eh? Well, it's a helpin' trait for some men."

"Are you meanin' any particular breed?" queried Jim dryly.

"Yes. Spies, gamblers, thieves, gun throwers, an' the like."

"Thanks. I'm shore appreciatin' the way you speak. An' not wantin' to be

outdone in compliments, I'll just repeat what Miss Hettie Ide called you—a conceited ass! A deep an' cunnin' scoundrel!"

"You heard all she said?" snarled Dillon.

"Shore. An' I never heard a low-down man called more proper. Tickled me more because only today someone called you a handsome, smilin'-faced liar."

"Aho! You happened to hear a good deal, now didn't you, stranger?" returned Dillon. "Well, I don't care a damn."

"Shore you don't. A skunk stinks so bad that nothin' but bullets can get to his hide."

"You're a brave man, stranger, shoutin' that way above your gun. But I'm tired listenin. Are you from New Mexico?"

"No. I was lyin'."

"Ahuh? An' you've got a hunch that's where I come from?"

"I reckon."

"You see I don't deny it. What do I care what you know or think or do? You pose for a dandy cowboy. But you're not ridin' for any outfit around Winthrop. You excite a little suspicion yourself, mister, considerin' this country is full of outlaws an' rustlers."

"It shore is. That's why I come over," returned Jim meaningly.

For the first time the dark red showed in Dillon's face. "I'll have you put out of here," he said. "An' I'll tip Macklin off that you need watchin'."

"Wal," drawled Jim, with his glance cold and set, "go ahaid, but be shore to tip him off that I'm Jim Lacy."

Dillon's stalwart frame jerked with a perceptible tremor. A slow pale shade began to blot out the brown of his face.

"Jim Lacy, eh! Say, I've had that dodge worked on me before. Paradin' under a dead man's name! It's an old trick of four-flushers."

But Dillon was not so cocksure as his bluster was intended to indicate. His iron nerve had been pierced. Here was a name to conjure with.

"You expect me to believe you're Jim Lacy?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Wal, I'm tellin' you, but it's nothin' to me what you believe," returned Jim icily.

"All right. But I still figure you a liar."

Jim sprang forward and knocked Dillon down.

"Wal, shore it may take more'n that," he said in slow accents. "But I told you who I am. An' that's somethin' you didn't tell me."

Dillon cautiously arose on his hand, lifting a dark face to his assailant. But he made no response.

Jim, wheeling away to go, found himself confronted by Rose Hatt. The girl had seen at least the last of Jim's encounter with Dillon.

"Oh—mister!" she cried.

The dancers were trooping off the floor. A tall youth, with features strangely familiar to Jim, appeared behind Rose. She clasped his arm, while she stared from Jim to Dillon, who had not attempted to get up. Without a word Jim hurried on.

"My—God! Who was that?" called out someone Jim took to be the youth with Rose. The voice urged him faster through the throng of dancers and out into the street.

"That was Marvie Blaine, God bless him!" whispered Jim, as he gained the darkness. "Shore a close shave for me."

It was eleven o'clock when Jim entered the Ace High Saloon, one of the

noted gambling-hells of the southwest.

He bolted into the barroom like a man who was being pursued. He was, indeed, though not by any visible thing.

"Cowboy, what you runnin' from?" queried a tall man standing near the door, his back to the bar. A brass shield stood out prominently on his vest.

"Howdy, Macklin!" Jim said nonchalantly. "I was just runnin' from a sheriff."

"Wal, you run right into another," growled Macklin, surprised and annoyed. "Who air you?"

"Foreman of the Coffee Pot outfit."

"What's your handle, smarty? It jest happens there ain't any Coffee Pot outfit at this particular time. I've a notion to clap you into the jug. You look kinda pale round the gills. What have you been up to an' who air you?"

"None of your damn business," returned Jim with abrupt change of tone and manner. "But if you hang around I reckon somebody'll tell you."

"Hyar, you come right along with—"

"*Look out, Mack!*" interrupted someone behind Jim. A glass went crash on the floor, and the rasp of heavy boots followed. Then a man strode in front of the sheriff, facing Jim. "Excuse me, stranger, but I believe I know you. If I'm wrong, say so."

"Howdy, Cash!" returned Jim, extending his hand.

Cash Burridge looked a full ten years older than when Jim had last seen him. Drink and hard life and evil passion had broken the man. His lined dark visage worked convulsively into a broad smile.

"Jumpin' steers!" he ejaculated, grasping Jim's hand in both his and wagging it vigorously. His eyes lighted. "If it ain't you!"

"Shore is, Cash. Just got in, an' am lookin' for trouble."

"No! I'm a son-of-a-gun! It's you,—changed a lot. Most in disposition—if it's true. You're *lookin'* for trouble."

Here the sheriff interposed by placing an ungentle hand on Burridge's shoulder.

"Friend of yours, hey? That's no guarantee to keep him out of jail."

"Hell!" exploded Burridge. "I'm tryin' to keep *you* out of the boneyard. My Gawd! If I told you who this man is you'd sweat blood."

Macklin's jaw dropped and he swayed back against the bar. Then Burridge drew Jim aside from the gaping, grinning bystanders.

"It's you—really *you*, Jim?" he whispered huskily.

"Shore, Cash. Cain't you see?"

"But we heard you were dead."

"That was terrible exaggerated."

"Dropped from the sky! Jim Lacy, just down from heaven, huh? Well, I'm damned! Where you been, Jim, since you left Lineville? Lord! I never forgot that night you shot Link Cawthorne's eye out."

"Wal, Cash, never mind where I've been."

"Sure, that doesn't matter, only I was curious. I had a hunch you went to New Mexico an' got mixed up with some of those *hombres* who got out of that Lincoln County war alive. I know one of them did. Close pard of Billy the Kid."

"Who?" queried Jim.

"I'm not givin' any man away, Jim. When'd you drift in?"

"Today."

"You'll be recognized here."

"Who's goin' to recognize me, Cash?" Jim asked.

"You remember Ace Black? He's upstairs playing faro. Reckon Black will

know you, but he'd never give you away. Hardy Rue, though. He will. He never cottoned to you. Always had a hunch you'd killed Less Setter. Rue has dogged me all these years. An' I'm layin' it to him that I'm down on my luck now."

"Wal, what come of your ranchin' deal heah, Cash?"

"Jim, you had me figured. I couldn't stand prosperity," returned Burridge heavily. "But I swear I went straight till I got in need of money. I'd made poor deals. I could steal cattle an' make money, but not by tradin' or ranchin'. I began to borrow. Then I had a chance to sell out to Ben Ide, a Californian. I did him dirt, an' I've lived to be sorry. There's a man, Jim! Well, when I was flush again I began to drink an' buck the tiger."

"An' now you're aboot broke. Who got all that money, Cash?"

"Aw, everybody. Hardy Rue beat me out of most of it. I fell in love with a Spanish girl here. She an' Rue double-crossed me. Got my pile!"

"Where do you hang out, Cash?"

"I've been most here in town," replied Burridge. "I've a cabin down in the brakes."

"Are you acquainted down there?"

"Sure am, Jim. An' I'm givin' you a hunch there's some hard customers driftin' in. It's a hell of a rough country an' big as all outdoors."

"Wal, Cash, when you was rich an' high-handed I didn't have much use for you," said Jim with a smile. "But now you're broke an' down on your luck, I reckon I'll chip in with you."

"Jim Lacy! You always was a queer one," returned Burridge feelingly. "Reckon I know you've got somethin' up your sleeve, an' whatever it is, I'm sure with you."

"All right, Cash. Suppose you tote me around to look 'em over."

Chapter Eleven

"Jim Lacy's in Town!"

HETTIE had attended the dance at Winthrop as a guest of Alice Franklidge, nineteen, and daughter of the judge's second wife.

She was a frank, breezy, Western girl to whom Hettie took a liking, and they were on the way to becoming real friends.

They left the dance before midnight, to be driven out to the Franklidge house by Alice's escort.

When they arrived at the Franklidge home, which stood on a bench of high ground, among stately pine trees, the girls went in to find the judge smoking beside an open fireplace. He greeted Hettie warmly.

"Did you meet your brother?" he asked, as he placed a chair for her.

"No. Did he come in, after all?" she asked.

"Yes. He was here for an hour," replied the judge. "Came in to talk over a cattle deal. I advised him not to buy more stock just now."

"Was Ina with Ben?" asked Hettie.

"Sure was, and she looked powerful handsome. I wanted them to stay here overnight. But Ben said he'd rather go to the hotel, so he could be in town early. Left word if he didn't see you at the dance that you were to meet him tomorrow at noon sharp. At Brydon's."

"Goodness! I'm glad we got away from the dance before Ben arrived," exclaimed Hettie.

"Well now, you don't say?" queried the judge, lowering his head to gaze at her over his glasses.

"I'm afraid it's going to be embarrassing for me when I see Ben. I'll have to tell him I—I discharged Dillon."

"Dillon! Clan Dillon? Did you fire *him?*" asked the judge, sitting up abruptly.

"I sure did," rejoined Hettie.

"I'll be darned. What for, lass?"

"I had reason enough, though I'm afraid Ben may not see it that way. He swears by Dillon. Well, Mr. Dillon has made it rather hard for me out at the ranch. He waylays me whenever I go outdoors. At first he didn't do me the honor to offer marriage. But finally he got that far along, and despite my refusals he kept at it. I did not know he was to be at the dance tonight, or I wouldn't have gone. But I danced with him, and walked with him, on the terrace—and—well, to make it short he insulted me."

"Lass, now just how did Dillon insult you?" asked Judge Franklidge, with fire in his eye.

"He declared he was going to have me whether I wanted it or not, and I had to fight him!"

"You don't mean he dared to lay a hand on you?"

"Both hands, and arms, too," laughed Hettie, though she blushed as she admitted it. "In fact, he was a ruffian. I imagine Dillon has had his way with a certain kind of women. I think he expected me to squeal, or beg—then flop into his arms. But I'm strong and I broke away from him."

"Damned hound! Somebody ought to use a quirt on him," ejaculated the judge, growing red.

Hettie held back revelation of Dillon's threat to ruin Ben and herself.

"So I discharged Dillon," she concluded.

"You did right, lass, but how in the devil is Ben going to take that?" queried Franklidge seriously. "He thinks a heap of this Dillon. Only tonight he was bragging about Dillon's recovery of a bunch of cattle that'd just been rustled off into the brakes. Still, come to squint at the offense, Ben can't overlook it. He's bound to stand by your dismissal of this foreman."

"You don't know my brother very well yet," returned Hettie. "If he had *seen* Dillon insult me he'd have horsewhipped him. But Ben scouts my statements. He's tired of hearing about these lovelorn cowboys who annoy me. He thinks I'm—well, a little too sensitive. Once he said, 'If I was that cowboy I'd throw you on a horse and ride off with you.' And another time when I went to him in distress he said, 'Of course he tried to kiss you. Why shouldn't he? You were made to be loved and kissed.' Sometimes I believe Ben is only in fun. He doesn't mean that as it sounds. But I declare I don't know how he will take this Dillon affair."

"I'll tell you, lass, now that you've expounded the situation," replied the judge. "He'll not uphold you. Dillon will get to him first and soften his offense, and Ben will keep him on."

'That would be dreadful," said Hetti'. "I'll actually be afraid of Dillon."

"Well, the only solution to your problem, Hettie Ide, is to fall in love with some fine Arizona lad."

"Indeed!" returned Hettie, trying in vain to look haughty. Then she thought it might be just as well to drop a hint to these new friends. "I'd take your advice, Judge Franklidge—if it wasn't for an insurmountable obstacle. I can't

fall in love with a fine Arizona lad, because I'm already in love with a fine —*Nevada* lad!"

As the beloved name sounded off her lips Hettie felt the swift blood rise to tighten and heat her face.

The judge laughed heartily, but Alice, intuitively grasping the import beneath Hettie's rather flippant speech, crossed over and put an arm around her.

"Dad is as bad as Ben, dear. Come, it's late. Let's go to bed," she said.

"Well, Hettie," added the judge in the same mirthful vein, "if I were forty years younger I'd contest this mysterious Nevadan's rights. Where is the confounded lucky jackass?"

Hettie looked back from the doorway, through which Alice was leading her.

"I do not know," she replied sadly.

At breakfast next morning Judge Franklidge's interest in Hettie had increased, but he dispensed with the mischievous bantering.

"Hettie," he said, at parting, "I'm ashamed of the way Arizona has treated you and Ben. But listen, lass. Have faith in us and this grand country. Have patience with your brother. Try to persuade him not to spend more money just now. We may have a year or two, or more, of hard times. But take the word of an old cattleman who has been through more than one rustler war. We will come out of it. These outlaws destroy themselves. I've a hunch some hard-shootin' gunman will come along and do for the ringleaders. It's happened here before. It happened lately in New Mexico. So do not lose your nerve and come to hate this beautiful country. We want you Ides to love it. We need such fine people. We are pioneers, Hettie. I've lost a million on cattle. But it'll come back. And so will your losses. Likewise your happiness."

"Judge Franklidge," answered Hettie, smiling through her tears, "despite my weakness for *Nevada*—I reckon I'm Arizona's for life."

"Whoopee! That's the game lass! Come to see us often, Hettie. *Adios*."

One of the Franklidge stable hands drove Hettie into town. Upon arriving, she went about buying the supplies usually ordered twice a month. She and her mother had preferred to keep house in their own little cabin.

After she had finished her ordering, Hettie passed on downstreet, presently to encounter Ben. He did not look in a very good humor.

"Ina is at the dressmaker's," he said, after greeting her. "Reckon it's a good time for you to go to the bank with me."

"Bank. What for?" she queried, as she yielded to his hand and turned back up the street.

"I'm having a certified check made out to you for your interest in the ranch."

"Ben!" she cried in amazed reproach.

"Yes, Ben," he returned, a little testily. "Hettie, I can't have you doing things without my knowledge. Besides, I don't want to see you lose that

money. And I'm pretty certain I'll lose all I put in cattle."

"But, Ben, it was an investment. I played to win or lose with you," she protested.

"I know, dear, an' you sure are a thoroughbred. But this was a crazy deal of mine. I don't regret it. But I can't feel right to have you in with me. Maybe some day, when these bad times are over."

"Ben, something has happened since I saw you," said Hettie quickly.

"I reckon it has," returned Ben, dropping his head so she could not meet his eyes. "California Red is gone!"

"Gone? Oh no, Ben!" Hettie cried poignantly.

He nodded disconsolately. She saw his lips quiver.

"Stolen?"

"We don't know. He disappeared from the pasture. Raidy swears Red was stolen, that he couldn't jump the fence. I know he could jump over the moon if he took a notion. Dillon agrees with me that Red just got away."

"But you don't *know*?"

"That's the rub, Hettie. We don't. And there isn't a man in my outfit who could track Red. I tried to myself. Had to give up. Reckon there never was but one horse hunter who *could* have done it."

"Ben, you'll get Red back," replied Hettie earnestly, and forthwith she launched into an elequent speech, drawing upon the judge's advice and optimism, and adding considerable of her own hopeful opinions as to their ultimate success and happiness in the future.

"You're game, Hettie," he returned, squeezing her arm. "With you and Ina and the kid I can an' will beat this rotten deal. Reckon it'll help some if you consent to withdraw from it."

"I'll consent to anything that will help you."

They reached the bank, where presently Hettie received a certified check for her share in the transaction. She immediately deposited it to her account.

"For the time being I'll leave it there," she said.

"Yes, do. I might have to borrow from you," he laughed, then with serious brow he drew her to a seat and said in a low voice, "Dillon just told me you'd discharged him."

"Yes?" queried Hettie, lifting her chin, while the tingle and heat of battle ran along her nerves.

"Hettie, I had to countermand your order," he went on gravely. "Now we won't argue about it. Dillon is the best man available. I can't get along without him. He knows it, too. I had some trouble conciliatin' him."

"Oh, indeed!" retorted Hettie, biting her lips. "May I ask what Mr. Dillon told you?"

"Not much. He was sore, but he laughed, at that. Said he loved you an' had been coaxin' you to look upon him favorably. Then last night—at the dance—he asked you to marry him. Said you weren't very encouragin'. Then he tried to kiss you, an' you made a fuss an' took it upon yourself to fire him."

"If you believe him, Ben, why, there's no need in my bothering you with my side of the story."

"Reckon there's no call to think Dillon's a liar," went on Ben. "The truth is, Hettie, you're a little of a man-hater. Oh, I know—I remember, an' I sure don't blame you for bein' true—to—to *him*. But you're hard on

all these poor devils who fall in love with you."

"Ben Ide, I am not a man-hater," protested Hettie.

"We won't argue the question," said Ben wearily. "But please don't misunderstand. I don't want you to marry Dillon. He seems a fine fellow who'll make a big man in Arizona some day. Just the same, I'd want to know him better before I'd let him have you."

"Thank you, Ben. I can forgive you now."

"I'd like to ask you somethin'," went on Ben, with both concern and mirth in his look. "Did you strike Dillon last night—when he tried to kiss you at the dance?"

"Strike him? No, I certainly did not," declared Hettie vehemently. "I wouldn't soil my hands on—but why do you ask that?"

"Well, he had a beautiful black eye. He told me he had stumbled in the dark—in his room—an' hit a chair. But it looked to me like a beautiful black eye that had come from a good swing an' a hard fist. I've been wonderin' if he lied to me."

"Well, I'm wondering who gave him just what he deserved. But, Ben, if you have such faith in this Dillon, why did you wonder at all?"

"I happened to run into Dillon talkin' to Stewart, Tom Day's foreman. I heard Dillon say somethin' about bumpin' into a chair. Then Stewart, who'd been drinkin', gave Dillon the horselaugh. Struck me funny, that's all."

"Brother dear, I hope you won't be struck by anything funnier," said Hettie, as she arose. "I've got more shopping to do, and time flies. You wished me to meet you at twelve?"

"You bet; *pronto*, too," he returned.

It lacked five minutes to twelve when Hettie labored to the front of the store, burdened by bundles. Ben was punctuality itself and appreciated the same in anyone. Hettie deposited her bundles on a windowseat beside the door, and looked out for Ben. He had not yet arrived.

Suddenly a man, hatless and coatless, dashed by, yelling, "*Keep off the street!*"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Hettie, amused.

Several clerks came hurriedly to peep out.

"Looks like another fight," said one of them, excitedly.

Shouting and trampling of feet followed. Across the street pedestrians hurriedly ran into the first open doorway they happened upon. The noise ceased. Then a man entered the door where Hettie stood transfixed and thrilling.

"Hello, Matt! What's doin'?" queried the clerk.

"Darned if I know," replied the man. "I seen people run off the street, so I ducked in here. Just before I heard Jim Lacy was in town."

Faces appeared at all doors and windows. Some peeped down the street, then jerked back. How ridiculous it seemed to Hettie! Yet there she stood likewise, her heart throbbing, her whole being in a state of suspense.

A shot pealed out, deep and ringing. Then *bang!* Another followed, almost like an echo. Silence ensued, palpitating, stifling to Hettie. What had happened? A fight! Guns! A single shout came from far down the street.

The man beside Hettie peeped out.

"By Gawd!" he ejaculated, in husky accents.

The clerk, frightened as he was, also

had to look. He jerked in his head, with pale face and eyes starting, and he began to jabber.

Hettie obeyed an irresistible instinct. She peeped out. The street appeared empty. No, there was a man lying face down, not fifty feet from the door. His arms were outstretched.

"It's Jim Lacy. I never saw him, but I know them who has," said the man beside Hettie.

"Oh—how dreadful! The dead man—there in the road—Jim Lacy?" whispered Hettie, beginning to shake and grow sick.

"No. Jim Lacy is the one comin' up the street there. See his gun? Look! It's smokin'!"

Then Hettie, looking farther, espied a man in rider's garb, gun in hand, stalking toward his victim. He passed him, with only a downward glance. He sheathed the gun. He strode toward the sidewalk.

His walk! His shape! A terrible piercing sensation attacked Hettie. Was she mad? What flashed so swiftly in memory? But this man—this Jim Lacy! He was coming. He would pass the door.

Hettie drew back with the last of failing strength. She reeled. Her mind had halted. The quivering of her body ceased as if paralysis had set in. Cold, numb, awful suspense held her upright, waiting.

The man in rider's garb passed the doorway, erect, stone-faced, with eyes of lightning set ahead.

Nevada! Hettie's faculties leaped out of terror and stupefaction to recognize him. Nevada! Jim Lacy?—*Nevada!*

She had a sense of sinking down. All went blank—then slipped into black oblivion.

Chapter Twelve

"Fire Your Foreman!"

HETTIE recovered consciousness before she had strength enough to open her eyes. She was lying down, with someone supporting her head. Cold water had been dashed in her face to revive her.

"It's Miss Ide," said someone. "She fainted—fell right down!"

"No wonder!" returned another speaker, a woman. "I'm sort of sickish an' weak myself. Hadn't you better call a doctor?"

Whereupon Hettie opened her eyes, to whisper weakly, "I'll be—all right."

She lay on the window seat, with her head supported by the young clerk. Several persons stood around sympathetically.

"There! She's come to."

A bewildering complexity and whirling of thought suddenly left Hettie with her mind clear. When Ben and Marvie entered, at that moment, she understood what the question was. Neither of them knew what she knew. Her relief was so great that it overcame her, and when she tried to rise she only sank back again.

"Why, Hettie!" cried Ben in sharp concern, as he sat down to grasp her. Then Marvie knelt on the seat at her other side. Hettie smiled wanly at them and closed her eyes. She felt dizzy.

"It's nothin' serious, Mr. Ide," spoke up the clerk hastily. "She just fainted. It was the shootin'."

"Whew, Hettie! You gave me a scare," said Ben, as he hugged her and shook her a little. "But you're all right.

It was only a street duel. Why, I'm surprised at you. Anyone would think you'd never heard a gun back in California. Come, brace up, Hettie."

"Take me home," replied Hettie, opening her eyes again. "I—I want to get out of this town."

"Wal, I should smile! Me, too," joined in Marvie, squeezing her hand. Hettie had never seen the lad look quite as he did then. The freckles stood out on his pale wet face. His eyes held a bright stare. She did not dare ask him if he had seen the participants of the street duel. She feared he had.

"Marvie, you fetch these bundles," requested Ben, as he lifted Hettie to her feet. He swore under his breath; then, scornfully: "This Arizona's a nice place for women! Never mind, honey; maybe we'll get over it. I'm thankin' my stars Ina didn't see."

Ben helped her into the back seat of the buckboard. "There, you're all right. Marvie, get in beside Hettie an' hang on to her. Soon as I pick up Ina, I'll sure leave this town in a cloud of dust."

Hettie did not look to right or left, yet she saw and heard the excited people passing, talking down the street. Ben drove rapidly. Soon he halted the horses before a house set well back in a green yard, and as he leaped to the ground Ina appeared.

"Hello, you-all!" she called merrily. "See, Ben, I'm right on the dot." As she reached the buckboard she suddenly halted aghast. "Why, Hettie! You look terrible. Are you ill? Oh, what has happened?"

"Nothin' to upset you, wife," replied Ben. "Hettie had a scare. There was a shootin' fray downtown, an' she fainted. Climb up, an' we'll be off *pronto*. These ponies are sure rarin' to go."

As soon as Ina had climbed up she turned solicitously to Hettie and reached for her hand. "You poor dear! Fainted! Why? Did you see a fight?"

"No. I didn't see—the fight," replied Hettie, shutting her eyes tight. "But I heard it. Then I peeped out—to see a —a dead man lying in the street."

"How dreadful! Oh, this wild Arizona! Ben, did you see this fight?"

"No. I missed it."

"Did you, Marvie? Oh, I hope you didn't."

"All I saw of it was the dead man. I walked by him. He had a bloody hole in the top—"

"Shut up, you infant gun slinger," interrupted Ben.

"Did you know the fighters, Ben?" went on Ina curiously.

"No. Someone told me Jim Lacy had come to town, lookin' for trouble. He gave a rustler named Hardy Rue choice of leavin' town or throwin' a gun. Rue chose to stick, an' it cost him his life. Had no chance on earth, someone said. They met in the street. Even break, of course. But Rue was fallin' when his gun went off."

"Terrible," said his wife, shuddering. "But a rustler cannot be a very great loss to the community."

"Ina, I sure hope Mr. Jim Lacy sticks around for a while," replied Ben laconically. "Tom Day told me Hardy Rue might be the leader of the rustlers who've been pinchin' me so hard. But Dillon scouted the idea."

During this conversation Hettie was glad to have the support of Marvie's arm and shoulder. She had not opened her eyes. But her ears rang acutely with the words she heard.

The spirited team drew the light

buckboard at a rapid pace over the smooth, hard road. The breeze stirred by this pace was cool and pleasant to Hettie's throbbing brow. After a long rest, she opened her eyes and sat up again. What was it that had stricken her, almost unto death? If she were only alone in her room, so that she could face the catastrophe, so that she could give way to her agony! But many miles and hours lay between her and seclusion. She essayed to make conversation with Marvie.

"Your girl is very pretty, Marvie," she said, close to his ear. "I saw her with you at the dance."

Marvie actually blushed and squirmed, and gripped Hettie's arm so hard that it hurt.

"Marvie, you are no longer a boy. You're a young man with prospects. And she—forgive me—she belongs to that notorious Hatt family, I'm told. I don't blame you for—for admiring her; she's like a wild rose. But say it's not serious."

"I wish I could," whispered Marvie, swallowing hard.

"Marvie! Tell me."

"Not now. I can't, Hettie," he said huskily. "But I will when we get home."

"I'm on your side," concluded Hettie.

For a while she was able to concentrate her thoughts upon this lad and the girl, Rose Hatt, and the unhappiness that might accrue for both. Soon Hettie's will succumbed to the tremendous pressure of recurring thoughts and emotion. She gave up. She had to let herself go.

She had seen Nevada. She could not have been mistaken. Sight and heart and mind, her whole being had recognized him in one terrible instant. He was in Winthrop. He was Jim Lacy. Jim Lacy, whom range rumor had long made mysterious, famous, ruthless. Jim Lacy was Nevada. Why was she stunned? Ever since Nevada had killed Setter and ridden away Hettie had realized he had borne a name he could not endure for her or Ben to know. That was not so astounding. Nevada might have been any one of the noted desperadoes of the West. The overwhelming thing was that Nevada was here in Arizona, alive, virile, stone-faced as she had seen him but once, here in Winthrop, close to the home she and Ben had chosen almost solely in the hope that they might find him some day.

What if she had seen him? A sickening helpless impotence assailed her. All the longing of years wasted! All the hope and prayer and faith wasted! Nevada had been false to her, false to the best she had helped to raise in him, false to the blessed conviction she had always entertained—that whoever he was and whatever he had done, out of love for her and assurance of her faith, he would go on to disappear from the evil roads of the West and turn to an honest life. Hettie would have gambled her soul on that. And now the soul she would have staked grew sick with horror and revulsion. Nevada was a consort of rustlers, a bloodthirsty killer, a terrible engine of destruction.

But perhaps he had only killed a bad man—a thief—even as Less Setter had been! The insidious small voice beat at the gate of her consciousness of faithlessness. And she listened, she clutched at it with the hope of a drowning woman. So with unseeing eyes on the rolling, darkening desert, she admitted more and keener anguish into this strife of love and faith. How could

she be faithless in hope, in trust? Had she not sworn, with her lips close to his, that she would die before she ever failed him? What if he had used his deadly gun again? He had killed, as before, perhaps more than once in his life, a worthless wicked man, whose death must serve some good purpose. Nevada had once saved Ben and Ina and her, all of them, from grief and misery. Who could tell what the killing of Hardy Rue might be to someone? No! Nevada had not sunk to the companionship of evil men and women, to drinking, gambling, rustling, to the vile dregs of this wild West!

Over and over again these thoughts eddied through Hettie's mind, like conflicting tides, now rushing, again receding, now full and devastating. Through the waning afternoon, sunset, twilight, dusk, on into the night Hettie acquired deeper insight into the gulf which yawned beneath her.

When at last they arrived at the ranch she crept exhausted to her room, and falling upon her bed, she lay quiet, wanting to rest and think before she undressed. But she fell asleep.

The next day Hettie plunged into her work, which consisted of the housekeeping she shared with her mother, her dressmaking and other personal tasks, and all the bookkeeping necessary to the running of a large expensive ranch.

She did not see Ben all day. Late in the afternoon, when she went out to walk a little in the open air, she espied Marvie sitting on the porch, a most abject-looking lad.

"Hello, Marv, old pard! Come and walk with me," she said brightly.

"Aw, I want to die!" replied Marvie.

"Good gracious! Well, don't do that on my porch. It'd be a perpetual reminder of you."

She dragged him to his feet and locking an arm with his led him off into the woods, until they were out of sight of anyone at the house. Then Hettie bade him sit with her under an old pine.

"Now, Marvie, I'm through teasing," she said. "What's the trouble?"

"I had a run-in with Ben," replied the lad. "First one we ever had."

"You did? Well, I've had a thousand. Where did Ben go today?"

"We rode off to a deserted homestead over here, five miles or so. Someone found tracks of California Red, and that news upset Ben. Then he waited round hours for Dillon, who didn't come. Raidy, who's on the outs with Dillon, said some things that made Ben sorer. Well, doggone it, Ben pretty soon pitched into me."

"What for?" queried Hettie practically.

"Nothin'. 'Cept I moped along at a job he gave me. Fixin' fence. If there's any job I hate it's that. He swore at me. Then I told him to go to the devil—I'd quit and go home."

"What did Ben say?" asked Hettie.

"He said, 'Go ahead, you bull-headed, lop-eared little jackass.' So I rode off home. And I reckon I'll quit. I'm goin' to be a rustler."

"All right. You want to become a rustler," returned Hettie. "What for?"

Marvie did not reply for a long while, during which his head sank lower.

"Hettie, I'm turrible—in love," he said at last, with an effort.

"Rose Hatt?"

"Yes. It couldn't be nobody else."

"Does Rose love you?" asked Hettie softly, her hand going to Marvie's.

"I thought she did, at first," replied the boy, writhing. "She let me kiss her —kissed me back. But the other night, when I asked her to meet me again, she said no. I got mad. But she stuck to it. When I accused her of flirtin', and me dead in earnest, she said, 'Marvie, I've a bad name. I belong to the Hatts. You've a lovely sister and a proud family. I'm only a backwoods girl. It won't do. I'll not see you no more.' She ran away from me then an' I couldn't find her."

"Marvie, I admire Rose for that," said Hettie earnestly. "I think she's a square girl, even if she is a Hatt."

"Now, Hettie, don't you go talkin' like Dad or Mother," burst out Marvie warningly.

"Oh, Marvie, I won't," declared Hettie, ashamed of the fact that she had been about to do so.

"I don't care a damn about myself —even when I do love her turrible," went on Marvie passionately. "But what's to become of Rose?"

"I understand, Marvie," said Hettie gravely. "You make me ashamed. Rose is not to blame for her family, for her surroundings, for—anything."

"Now you're talkin' like Hettie Ide," returned Marvie fervently. "And I'm givin' you a hunch. If Rose really loves me I'll stick to her. In spite of Dad or Ben or anyone!"

Hettie dropped her head. Here was a problem. What should she say? Marvie's confidence in her suddenly meant more than ever before. He needed something from her.

"What knocks me flat is—I'm afraid she doesn't love me," went on the lad. "I'm goin' to find out, though, if I have to ride right under Cedar Hatt's nose. Last night I believed she didn't. This mornin' I thought she did. If not —if she was only a little hussy—why'd she say she had a bad name and wouldn't meet me no more?"

Hettie had no quick reply to his passionate query. She was fighting a conviction that Rose Hatt had shown nobility and sacrifice in her attitude toward Marvie's advances. If those atrtibutes did not spring from love, Hettie did not know what to call it.

"Tell me, Hettie," begged Marvie, with soul-searching eyes that hurt her, "don't you think Rose cared really? Wasn't that good in her—givin' me up? Wasn't it because she—she liked me too well to go on with what she thought might disgrace me an' you an' Ben?"

"Marv, I can't be sure, but I think so."

"Thanks—Hettie," choked the lad, sitting up straight and facing ahead. A light crossed his somber youthful face. "You hit me right here." And he put his hand to his breast. "Sure I couldn't tell nobody else but you. It's helped a lot."

"Marvie, how in the world did all this come about?" asked Hettie in wondering sympathy.

"Like a story, Hettie. I met Rose over a month ago. Went huntin' on a Sunday. Rode a long way, then walked. I got after some turkeys. I followed them a long ways, down into a big grassy canyon where a stream ran. Most beautiful place. And I run plump into a girl. She was cryin'. I spoke to her—sat down with her. After a while she began to talk. First she was sore an' hot at her brother, Cedar Hatt, who beat her. Showed me black-and-blue marks on her bare legs. Well, we got real friendly. She said she'd meet me again, but farther away. That place was too near home. So she told me where a trail ran and how I could find it.

I never told her who I was that time. Forgot. Anyway, I kept the day she set, and sure enough she came. It was different that day. I reckon I fell in love then—not the first day. And she—but never mind. I met her three times more. And last time, night before last at the dance. That's all."

"It's quite enough, isn't it, Marvie?" said Hettie.

"It sure is. I forgot to tell you. At the dance, when she said first she wouldn't meet me no more, I said I was goin' to our place Wednesday at the same time as before. I'm goin' too."

"Marv, if what I know of girls holds true—if she really cares—she'll come. Rose is too young to stick to a hard decision like that, if her heart's involved."

"Hettie, you're a comfort," cried Marvie gratefully, almost hugging her. "I'll hope she'll come. I'll believe it. Maybe that'll let me eat and sleep."

"You'll tell me everything?" asked Hettie earnestly.

"Yes. Now I'll go and crawl to Ben."

Several days passed. Hettie took to horseback-riding again, venturing perhaps farther away from the ranch than Ben would have allowed, had he known. But Hettie seemed driven. On Wednesday she rode with Marvie for five miles back into the forest toward the brakes, and that was the greatest ride she ever enjoyed.

On the last stretch back home, where the trail was fairly level and open, she urged her horse to his best speed. That race satisfied, for the time being, a restlessness and need of violence. Her blood danced hot; wind and sun burned her cheeks; the tang of the woods acted like wine. Thus she rode down into the clearing and on to the barn and corrals. And she ran pell-mell into Ben, Raidy, Dillon, and Tom Day, scattering them like quail.

"Hey there, you Indian!" yelled Ben, and he climbed a corral fence, the better to tease her.

Hettie reined her mount and, wheeling him, trotted back and slid from the saddle.

"He's a—fine horse, Ben," she declared.

"Wal, he suits you, lass," said Tom Day admiringly, as he took her in from boots to sombrero.

"Miss Hettie, strikes me this hyar Arizonie has got into your blood," added old Raidy, shaking his head dubiously. "Reckon I don't like it. Day says it ain't safe for you to ride out alone. So does Dillon."

"What do *you* say, Ben?" queried Hettie archly.

"Not a darn thing. I quit long ago tryin' to run you," returned Ben.

Dillon leaned against the corral, in the background, without entering into the conversation. The discoloration round his eye had not wholly disappeared.

"Miss, can't you be happy ridin' on the ranch, without headin' off into the woods?" asked Raidy.

"Do you think I'd ride inside a fence? Not much."

"Wal, Hettie Ide, I sure know what you need," declared Tom Day.

"To be spanked, I suppose," laughed Hettie. "But seriously, what's the danger?"

"Wal, lass, mebbe there ain't any real danger," replied Day thoughtfully. "But we're sort of locoed these days.

Reckon it's far-fetched to think hoss thieves an' rustlers might take a notion to steal you."

"Kidnap me for ransom?" queried Hettie incredulously.

"Wal, yes, an' for other reasons, too," rejoined the old cattleman significantly. "You don't 'pear to know it, but you're a mighty handsome girl."

"Thank you, Uncle Tom. That's a fine compliment. But it's not scaring me."

"Hettie, look here," interposed Ben gravely, stepping to her with a piece of paper in his hand. "Read this."

Hettie took the coarse dirty paper and read:

Ben Ide

Sir,

Fire your foreman Dillon or dig a grave for him.

X.

Without a word Hettie returned the slip to her brother.

"We found that nailed on the bunkhouse door," he said angrily. "It's a threat. Dillon recovered another bunch of my cattle yesterday. Only a few head, but enough to make these rustlers sore. Today we found where they'd been camping in an old cabin, on my own land. Of all the nerve! I've been reasonable about this cattle-stealing. I expected it. But when these thieves grab my best horse and camp right under my nose—it's time for me to get sore."

"See, Miss Hettie," added Raidy. "That's why it ain't safe for you to ride out so far."

"I'll be careful hereafter," replied Hettie soberly, handing her horse over to Raidy. She was proceeding up the lane, revolving in mind that threatening note Ben had showed her, when he caught up with her.

"Hettie, I don't like this situation I'm in."

"Neither do I, Ben. But nobody can tell you anything."

"Aw now, Hettie, that's not nice of you," said Ben. "I told Ina about your affair with Dillon—*your* side of it, mind you. She pitched into me like sixty. I can't stand havin' both of you against me."

"We're not against you, Ben."

"Yes, you are. An' I'm getting sore at everybody. I'm going against your advice and Ina's, even Tom Day's. I've offered a reward of one thousand dollars for the return of California Red. Posted notices along the trails. Tom didn't like that. Said someone would bring the horse back, then steal him again."

"What did Dillon say?" asked Hettie curiously.

"He approved my offering the reward. You know Dillon said he could get Red back. And he was away two days, after he returned from Winthrop. I don't know where he went. He's worked with most of these outfits along the Mogollons. He knows them all, anyway, and no doubt some of them are clanny with the horse and cattle thieves. That's the worst of this country. You really don't know who is honest. Well, Dillon came back and said he couldn't find out anything about Red. So I decided to offer a reward. And Dillon himself took the notices out on the range."

"You'll get Red back," returned Hettie hopefully.

"I've got another idea," he went on. "I want to send for several well-known man-hunters and put them on the track of these rustlers. Pat Garrett, of New Mexico. If I could get him, and a couple from Phoenix, and hire a

gang of hard-shooting cowboys, I'll bet they'd clean out the rustlers. But Tom Day yelled murder at the very idea. And Dillon, he hit the roof. Swore they'd burn me out instead of just rustling a few cattle. Few? By George! I'd like to know what Dillon would call a lot of cattle."

"Ben, you should listen to Tom Day, at least," replied Hettie. "He knows the country."

"I'm listening, Hettie. But I want some action," he retorted. "If I don't get Red back inside of ten days there'll be hell to pay by somebody."

Marvie did not return to the ranch till late. Hettie sat up waiting for him, gazing into the wood fire with dreamy, sad eyes. She heard his swift step on the porch, and a jingle of spurs, then a quick knock.

"Come in, Marvie," she called expectantly.

In he rushed, like the wind, but quietly, and he startled her with his pale face crossed by black smudges, and his piercing, radiant eyes. He carried a rifle and quirt and gloves in his hands; and altogether he appeared a striking, thrilling figure.

"She was there!" he whispered dramatically.

"Marv, I knew that the instant you entered," said Hettie with a smile.

"Hettie, I'm sure the happiest an' miserablest man in the world," he added.

"Sit down, and tell me all about it."

"Not a great deal to tell, but what there is of it is turrible," he returned, coming to the seat beside her. Then in a low voice, full of suppressed emotion, he went on, "Rose was there. She'd been there for hours, waitin', cryin', fearin' I wouldn't come. She said her heart broke. She'd found out she loved me. I was the only one who'd ever cared for her—been good to her. She said she could give me up—to save me disgrace—but she'd have to kill herself. I swore I'd stick to her—marry her. I talked an' talked. An' then I told her I'd fetch you down the trail next Wednesday. She was turrible scared at that. But I told her you'd help us. An' finally she agreed. That's all, Hettie. An' for God's sake—"

Marvie broke off huskily, his voice failing. Hettie impulsively kissed him.

"Marvie, I think you're pretty much of a man," she said. "I'll go. And I'll find some way to solve your problem."

He mumbled something incoherent and rushed out of the room. Hettie drew her chair nearer the fire and fell into grave and sympathetic pondering over Marvie's love affair.

Chapter Thirteen

Plain Talk from Raidy

EARLY riser as she was, Hettie outdid herself on this Wednesday morning, which was the day on which she had agreed to ride down into the brakes with Marvie.

There were tasks to see to, some of which she performed before breakfast. Hettie was still at the table when whoops outside alarmed her. Then she recognized Marvie's "Whoopee!"

"Gracious! Is the poor kid celebrating the arrival of this day?" ejaculated Hettie mirthfully.

Nevertheless, she ran out on the porch, followed by her mother.

"For the land's sake!" cried Mrs. Ide. "Has Marvie gone daffy!"

They saw him running wildly bareheaded, up the walk toward Ben's house. Once up on the ridge, Marvie espied Hettie, and waving to her he yelled, "Look down in the pasture!"

Hettie did so, but as her view was mostly obscured by pine trees she did not see anything unusual.

"*Whoopee!*" yelled Marvie again. "Hey, Ben!"

Hettie realized now that something was up, so she started to run across the log bridge. When she got halfway she saw Ben rush out on the porch, in his shirt sleeves, rifle in hand.

"What's the matter, Marv?" he shouted.

"*California Red's back!*" bellowed Marvie.

Hettie saw Ben start as if struck. Then he ran to meet Marvie. Hettie lost little time getting over the bridge and across the grassy bench. Ina came running in her dressing-gown.

"Oh, Ben—who—what is it?" she cried in alarm.

"Glory be! Ina, Red is back!"

"Ben, I'm—so glad," panted Hettie.

"Reckon Dillon fetched him back," sighed Ben, in unutterable gratitude.

"Dillon, hell!" exclaimed Marvie. "Dillon is in bed. There's nobody up but me."

"Ahuh! By George! Did you see anyone?"

"Not a soul."

"Well! That beats me. Let's go down. Ina, get some clothes on if you're comin'. Tell the kid. This'll sure tickle him."

Ben and Marvie, with Hettie trying to keep beside them, stalked down off the ridge, into the lane, through the courtyard, and on to the corrals. Raidy appeared on the bunkhouse porch and he carried a rifle.

"Boss, what's the bellerin' about?" he queried, as he joined the trio.

Marvie led the way through two corrals, and then across the wide square to a high pasture fence, up which he scrambled like a squirrel..

"There!" he shouted, pointing.

Ben surmounted the fence ahead of Hettie, and his wondering exultant cry prepared her.

California Red stood not far distant, down along the fence. Nervously he jerked up at Ben's cry, and wheeled with head high, ears up, eyes wild. How senstitive, splendid he looked to Hettie!

Ben whistled and began to call: "Red—Red, old boy, come here, Red!"

The stallion lost his alarm, and laying down his ears he approached slowly, step by step. Ben kept calling. Red knew the voice and showed increasing gladness. He whinnied. Then he trotted straight to where Ben straddled the fence. He looked the worse for his absence. Ragged, scratched, muddy, somewhat thinner, he showed the effect of hard travel and probably harsh treatment.

"Ben, somebody's been mean to him, else he wouldn't come hankerin' to you thet way," declared Raidy.

"By Heaven! if that's true!" cried Ben fiercely, and reaching out his hand he called again. "Come, Red. Come, old boy. Don't you know your boss?"

But Red would not come all the way. He halted, uncertain, pawing the ground. His dark eyes shone softly. Again he whinnied. Ben guardedly got down off the fence, speaking all the time, and slowly went up to Red, finally encircling the noble neck with his arm. Then he buried his face in the red mane.

Meanwhile the cowboys had arrived

on the scene. Raidy had opened the pasture gate. Presently Ben led the stallion through to the square.

"Look him over, Raidy," said Ben.

While the cowboys crowded around and Hettie still stayed on the fence, the better to see, the old horseman walked round Red, feeling him, examining him, lifting his hoofs one after the other.

"Wal, Boss, he's as sound as a bullet," declared Raidy gladly. "Ganted up a little an' got a couple of bad cuts. An' he's lost a shoe. Nervous an' skittish. But you can bet he's glad to git home; an' far as I can see he's no wuss for bein' stolen."

"Raidy, do you still hang to that opinion?" inquired Ben.

"I sure do. Why, man, don't you know hosses? Can't you see he's been haltered an' hobbled?"

"Aw, no!" said Ben.

"Sure. Look thar. Boss, you got him back an' I reckon you'll keep him this time. But don't let your love for the hoss blind you to facts."

Raidy kept running gentle, skillful hands over Red, ruffling up the silky hair, looking with the eyes of long experience to marks and signs by which he read something of what had happened to the horse.

"See for yourself," went on Raidy, with vehemence. "Look hyar! By Gawd! he's been roped, too!"

At this point Hettie espied Dillon stalk around the corner of the high fence. Abruptly he halted. Swift amazement and consternation leaped across his expression of curiosity, blotting it out. Then as swiftly his face changed, smoothing to a smile. What a handsome, pleasant man! Hettie marveled at his consummate control and acting. But he could not fool her again. The return of Red was actually as startling to Dillon as it had been to anyone else there.

"Ha! So, Boss, what'd I tell you?" he broke out. "The old red son-of-a-gun has come back. Jumped the pasture fence goin' an' comin'. Red, I take off my hat to you. But you never had me guessin'!"

"Dillon, I had it figured the same," declared Ben.

Raidy snorted his disgust. "An' you once a wild-hoss hunter! Say, if Red had *run* off he'd never have come back. I asked you to take a peep at them marks on him. But you keep huggin' the hoss an' you won't look."

"Old-timer, I'm so happy to get him back that I don't want to do anythin' else. Besides, Raidy, on the square, I'd hate to have it proved he'd been stolen."

"Stolen? That's nonsense, I tell you," interposed Dillon testily. "Red took a little run an' come home. I've had many a hoss do it."

"Not wild hosses, Mister Dillon," snapped Raidy.

"What do you know about hosses?"

"Wal, I reckon I've forgot more'n you ever knew," retorted Raidy. "I ain't doubtin' you've *had* a lot of hosses, Dillon, but you didn't *raise* them—you didn't *catch* them—an' you didn't *keep* them long."

This was pretty plain speaking, as was evinced by Ben's stepping between the men, and the dark flash that wiped out Dillon's geniality.

"What're you hintin' at?" he queried.

"I'm not hintin'. I'm tellin' you, that's all. An' you can like it or lump it."

Ben raised a hand to silence Raidy. "That'll do. You're both privileged to your opinions, but don't get nasty."

"All right, Boss," replied Raidy in an aggrieved tone. "But my word is sort of ridiculed hyar. An' I'm askin' thet you look at these marks on Red. If you won't I reckon I'll take it as a slap at me, an' I'll quit you cold."

"Raidy!" exclaimed Ben, astounded.

"You know me, Boss," returned the old horseman sturdily.

Ben wavered. He hoped to keep peace between the old and new hands, so valuable to him now. But Raidy had thrown down his gage and he looked formidable.

"Ben," called Hettie, "you've known Raidy all your life. He taught you how to ride. It's only fair that you listen to him."

"All right, Raidy, if you feel that bad about it," replied Ben resignedly.

Again the old horseman ran his gentle, skillful hands over Red's supple body, down to the wonderfully muscled legs. "Look hyar. He's been hobbled. See! He's been gone *ten* days. Thet mark was made no more'n yesterday."

"Reckon you're right," admitted Ben, as he slowly arose. "I apologize."

"No apology wanted," said Raidy. "All I want is for you to come out of your trance. Now look hyar. Look at Red's nose. He's been roped."

"By thunder! There's been a hackamore on him," ejaculated Ben.

Dillon was not to be outwitted, and he had swiftly followed Ben's examination of the horse.

"Damn if Raidy isn't right, Boss," Dillon exploded, evidently regretful. "There are the marks, plain as print. I apologize, too, Raidy. My mistake."

"Wal, Mister Dillon, I'm acceptin' your apology," drawled Raidy, his keen old hawk eyes on the handsome foreman.

Hettie was riding beside Marvie, across the western end of the sage flat, toward the fence which marked the limit of Ben Ide's ranch land.

Marvie dismounted to open the gate for them, and when he vaulted to the saddle again he grinned. "Nobody but Raidy saw us, an' he won't tell. But Ben would stand for anythin' today. Gee! how he loves that red horse! Gave me a hundred dollars, just for seein' Red first!"

"Early to bed, early to rise, makes a boy healthy, wealthy, and—"

"Gee! Do I feel rich!" interrupted Marvie. "An' I'd like to fly to town an' back. But it'll keep."

"Marvie, were you looking at Dillon when he first saw Red?" inquired Hettie.

"No, I wasn't. Why?" returned Marvie, turning to eye her.

"He struck me as being more amazed than any of us, and *not* so happy."

"Ahuh!" replied Marvie. It was evident that he chose to be noncommittal. Hettie, however, did not fail to catch the glint in his eye.

"Here's where we turn off, Hettie," he said, as he left the road. "Narrow trail, but good. Look out for the brush an' duck the branches. Ride now!"

He spurred his horse into a lope and Hettie did likewise. Soon they entered the forest, where the shade was welcome and no dust arose. This trail led west, toward the brakes and the frowning dark notches of the Mogollons, dim and purple in the distance.

They rode perhaps five miles before the trail began to penetrate deeper into the forest and to ascend into rockier and rougher country. They climbed high, and Hettie soon gathered what the brakes of the Mogollons meant. The brakes were canyons, running like the ridges of a washboard, walled

with brush and rock, choked with dense thickets, above which the lofty pines and spruces towered. Ridge after ridge Marvie climbed and descended, until coming to a deeper, clearer canyon he turned off to follow a willow-bordered stream.

As they progressed, again riding at a lope, the canyon widened and deepened, the walls grew rugged and unscalable, the fringe of pines on the rims lifted higher, and every aspect of the wilderness seemed likewise intensified. The time came when the horses had to walk again, down and down, under narrow gray shelves of stone, under the massed foliage of maple, oak, aspen, all beginning to show a tint of autumn. The stream grew larger, swifter, deeper, and its mellow roar filled the dreamy solitude.

"Somewhere along here we'll meet her," whispered Marvie fearfully. "It always scares me. That Cedar Hatt might be prowlin' along the rim to spy us. Rose is cute, though. I've waited half a day before she came."

They wound along the crooked trail, and if it were possible, Hettie imagined every vista wilder and more hauntingly beautiful than the last. The white bleached grass, the green willows, the amber rocks, the rushing foaming brook, the thickets of oak and aspen, the wonderful walls rising sheer, stained and mossy, up to the ragged fringed rims—all these aided the movement of leaves, the flash of birds, the fragrance of pine, the utter solitude, into working an enchantment upon Hettie's senses. No wonder Marvie had fallen in love with his wild Rose.

"I see her horse," whispered Marvie, as he halted. "She'll be near. We'll get off now. I'll hide our horses in the aspen thicket."

Hettie got off to hand her bridle to him, and waited while he led their mounts out of sight. Soon he returned and led her off the trail into the grass.

"Anyone ridin' along behind us would sure see our tracks," he whispered. "But that's a slim chance. You see it's an old unused trail here. The Hatts live over in the next canyon."

He led her up a gradual grassy slope, into the protecting shelter of low pines and silver spruces. "Look at the elk beds," he whispered, pointing to round places where grass and moss had been flattened.

Hettie espied a ragged red pony, without a saddle, haltered to a sapling. Then she saw a dark curly head rise above the tall grass. Next moment Marvie was speaking low: "Hettie, this is Rose Hatt. Rose, I've fetched her. This's Hettie Ide, my best friend an' sort of sister."

As Hettie sank down, smiling, with hands outstretched, the girl rose to her knees, her eyes dilating, her face without color.

"Rose, I'm glad—to meet you," whispered Hettie pantingly, and she kissed the girl.

"Oh, Miss Ide—you're good to come," faltered Rose. She was trembling all over.

Marvie knelt beside Rose, and it was evident this was a torturing moment for him, too. Ben Ide's sister was now face to face with the daughter of rustler and backwoodsman Elam Hatt, the sister of notorious Cedar Hatt.

"Hettie, I reckon Rose won't be so scared an' shy if I leave you alone with her," said Marvie. "So I'll keep watch below. An' don't forget we haven't lots of time."

Then with a bright and reassuring look at Rose he slipped off under the

low-spreading trees. Hettie turned to the girl. How like a woodland wildflower! Rose wore a buckskin blouse fringed and beaded, a ragged brown skirt. and boots without stockings. She held a sprig of tiny aspen leaves, turning gold.

"Rose, since Marvie loves you, I must love you, too," said Hettie, speaking the words that welled from her heart. She did not need to be told that Rose Hatt had never had love of mother, sister, or friend. The girl gave a little gasping cry of wonder and pain, then fell into Hettie's arms, where she burst into tears.

This made the ordeal easier for Hettie, and she held the girl in silence until the paroxysm of weeping had subsided. Then she began to talk, kindly, soothingly, as if to a child.

"Rose, you love Marvie, very much?"

"Yes," replied the girl simply. "I couldn't help it. But I didn't know at first. Not till the dance."

"Then you two have pledged your troth?"

"If you mean told our love, yes—Miss Ide. But I didn't promise to marry Marvie."

"He asked you, of course?"

"He begged me to," replied the girl, lifting her head with pride.

"Why did you refuse?"

"I love Marvie too well to hurt him with you an' all his family."

"Do you mean you think you'd disgrace him and us because you're a Hatt?"

"Yes, an' a good deal more I haven't told Marvie," she went on, steady of voice, though her round breast heaved. "Cedar would come down on Marvie an' you an' your brother Ben for money. An' so would another man whose name I daren't tell. He—this man—has got a hold on Cedar—an' me. He'd ruin us all."

"Rose, that's a strong statement," said Hettie. "But even if it isn't exaggerated it doesn't change the fact that you and Marvie ought to wait. You're both very young."

"I'm not exaggeratin'. I could tell you more. An' about marryin'—Marvie's reason for hurry is to get me away from the life I live. It's turrible, Miss Ide. I have to cook, wash, scrub for an outfit of rustlers an' hoss thieves. Look at my hands! Look at the black marks—here—an' there. I get kicked an' beat. Marvie knows an' he can't stand it any longer."

"Could you not leave this home?" queried Hettie earnestly.

"I've thought of that. Yes. I could. My dad wouldn't care. But I'd have to be a servant—or worse."

"No, indeed. Rose, you could come to my home."

"Oh, how—wonderful!" gasped the girl, rapturously clasping her hands. "But that'd be 'most the same as marryin' Marvie, so far as Cedar an'—that other man are concerned. No, it'd never do. But thank you—bless you!"

"Rose, we mustn't despair," continued Hettie, touched to the heart by this girl's sincerity. "Time will help us. If you could only escape this—this drudgery and shame."

"That's the hope which keeps me up, Miss Ide. If I could only tide over a little time! Cedar is goin' to hell fast. He's rustlin', gamblin', drinkin' harder than ever. He's under the thumb of—the man I daren't squeal on."

"But why daren't you?"

"Because if *he* didn't kill me, Cedar would. I'm the only one outside of this Pine Tree outfit who *knows*. An' my life ain't worth much."

"Pine Tree outfit!" echoed Hettie, her eyes lighting. "That's the mysterious gang of rustlers."

"It sure is. I'm trustin' you with my life, Miss Hettie. But I daren't tell more. Nobody knows how secrets slip out. You might talk in your sleep."

"Naturally. But I think you could risk it, considering I sleep alone," said Hettie. "Rose, this *is* a plot. We're all involved. Your people and mine. What a tangle! It must have been fate that brought you and Marvie together. Oh, if I only knew how best to advise you."

"Reckon I wish so, too. But I've got a hunch. It's my job to stick home—to fool my people—to learn all I can—to fight that devil off who—who—I must see Marvie very seldom an' be sure we're never ketched. Somethin' will happen, Miss Ide. You've made me feel it. You made things different. Neither Cedar—nor *him*, can last long in this country. Not now. I heard my dad say so. Oh, this is the second time my hopes have risen. Oh, I wish I could tell you of another friend I found lately. But he came to my home an' there was hell. I listened at night through the chinks of the logs. Cedar was wild. Cash Burridge was there. 'We've got a big deal on,' says Cash. An' that pleased all the gang except Cedar. They set to whisperin' an' I heard no more."

"Rose—isn't your friend—Jim Lacy?" whispered Hettie haltingly, with dry lips.

The girl caught her breath and drew back sharply.

"There, you have betrayed it," continued Hettie forcefully, trying to command her voice. "Call Marvie now. We will plan another meeting, then hurry home to the ranch. I've enough to think of—this time."

Rose silently slipped away under the pines, and Hettie, staring at the green-walled foliage, seemed to see a ghost.

"Oh, my God!" she whispered in an agony. "Nevada belongs to this thieving vile crew!"

Chapter Fourteen

Nevada Meets the Hatts

A GROUP of five dark-faced and dark-garbed campers sat around a beautiful opal-hearted cedar fire, at the wild edge of Black Butte, where it fell sheer into the brakes. Three of these men were playing cards, cross-legged in front of a saddle blanket, intensely intent on the greasy bits of colored pasteboard and the pile of gold coin and rolls of greenbacks. They were gambling—the absorbing pastime of all dyed-in-the-wool rustlers.

The other two men occupied a position on the opposite side of the fire. One had his back and his outspread palms to the blaze, while the other sat against a log.

"Hell, Jim," swore the standing man, flicking a hand toward the gamblers, "they couldn't hear the crack of doom. They'll gamble there all night or till one of them has all the money. An' what difference would it make now—if they did hear what you say?"

"Wal, Cash, the fact is I'm not used to crowds," replied the other. "It takes long to get acquainted. An' you know I can never be shore of any man."

"That's the price you pay for leadership. But I didn't mean to split hairs over it. I was just complainin' because you're so close-mouthed."

"What of it, Burridge?" queried Jim.

I shore talk plenty to you, don't I, when we're alone?"

"Course you do, Jim," answered Burridge. "All I want to get at is this. If you'd loosen up a little more, drink an' gamble a little, especially when we run into other outfits, it'd facilitate our plans."

"I reckon, Cash. But how can I have a quick eye an' hand if I drink? I'll agree, though, to be more friendly an' set in a game now an' then."

"Good! Reckon that'll do. Lord, Jim, don't get me wrong! Ever since you called Hardy Rue out an' killed him I've been ready to crawl an' wear my fingernails off scratchin' for you. I mayn't have been your friend back in Lineville, but I sure love you now. You've put me on my feet again."

"Wal, Cash, that's plain talk," replied Jim. "An' I don't mind sayin' I like you better than I used to. But I can't love any man or even be pards."

"Sure, sure I understand," returned Burridge hastily. "But you needn't tell that to our gang or any of these outfits we meet. They all think you were my pard back in California an' are yet. Burt Stillwell would have shot me, surer than the Lord made little apples. But he was afraid of you. He couldn't be himself, an' I'm tellin' you he was a bad *hombre*."

"Aw, bad, yes, in a sense of dirty yellow behind-your-back viciousness," agreed Jim. "I hate to throw a gun on such fodder. But he forced it. He kept still till he got a few drinks. Then he r'iled up aboot Ben Ide's red horse, an' he put in that ridiculous claim for his pard, Cedar Hatt. Wanted a share of the divvy for the cattle—for this Hatt fellow."

"The hell he did! Well, I wondered what it was about, But I was so glad I didn't feel no curiosity," returned Burridge. "Maybe you don't know it, Lacy, but you made a lot of friends by pluggin' Stillwell, an' one sure-enough enemy."

"Who's that? This Cedar Hatt?"

"He's the bird. A red-tailed buzzard, an' no mistake. He's a backwoodsman, Jim, like an Indian! who knows the woods. Cedar wouldn't ever try you out, unless, like Burt, he'd been lookin' at the bottle. All the same you'll be in more danger from Cedar than from all the gun throwers in Arizona. He'll trail you—ambush you in the woods."

"Much obliged, Cash," drawled Jim, yawning. "Reckon I'd better look out for this heah Cedar Hatt."

"I'm givin' you a hunch of hunches," declared Burridge. "I've other reasons besides affection not to want Jim Lacy killed. Cedar Hatt will be sore enough when he hears you put Stillwell over, but, say, when he learns you got that red stallion an' sent him back to Ide—my Gawd! brother, he'll be hell's fire!"

"How soon is he goin' to find out?" queried Lacy with more interest. "Stillwell cain't very wal tell. An' that pard of Stillwell's—Babe Morgan, someone called him—he'll be runnin' yet."

"Cedar'll find out *pronto*," declared Burridge. "If not from someone outside our outfit, then from someone inside. For you were playin' a queer high hand, Jim, when you took the stallion away from Burt an' Babe an' sent it back to the Ide ranch. They'd stolen it. Your argument sounded good to me. Ben Ide would raise more hell over the loss of California Red than a hundred thousand head of stock."

"Huh! I'll bet he would."

"Well, to go on, your argument looked good to me. Now I've got brains, an' most of these rustlin' *hombres* haven't

nothin' but spruce gum in their heads. That deal looked queer to all our outfit. Still, only Hubrigg opened his trap to say so. Hubrigg likes you, though, an' I think you can gamble on him."

Here Burridge leaned over toward Jim to whisper, "If our gang seem a little standoffish yet, it's only your reputation. Since you helped us to steal cattle an' drive them an' sell them, why, they're sure you are one of us, even if you are Jim Lacy."

"Reckon that ought to be aboot enough."

Burridge stalked away in the gloom of the forest, while Lacy, left alone, attended to the campfire.

Presently two dark forms entered the circle of light, and approached, talking low. Lacy got up to meet them.

"Howdy, Jim!" greeted the newcomer with Burridge. He was a swarthy-faced, beady-eyed white man with a strain of Indian or Mexican blood.

"Howdy, Stagg! Did you make a good job of it?" returned Lacy with apparent carelessness.

"Wasn't no job a-tall," said Stagg, reaching bare grimy hands toward the fire. "Soon as you-all left, the red hoss quieted down, an' I coaxed him out of thet measly leetle corral. He don' like thet. An' after he found out I was leadin' him home he didn't make no more fuss. Reckon it was nigh on midnight when we got down on the sage. I tied up both hosses, pulled off my boots, put on my moccasins, an' led the stallion five miles through grass an' sage. When I run into Ide's fence I kept goin' along till I come to a gate. I opened it an' let him in."

"Much obliged, Stagg. I—reckon it was no fool move of mine—though some think different," replied Lacy.

"Lacy, it was the slickest piece of headwork I ever seen on this range," declared Stagg. "I was at Burton's ranch the next day after Stillwell stole the stallion. Ide's cowmen came rarin' over the country. Thet Raidy, he's an old hand, an' he was mad as a hornet. An' today as I was climbin' the Hogback I run into a sheepherder I know. Greaser named Juan somethin'. He said Ide had plastered the trees along the trails, offerin' reward for Red."

"There, Jim—you see, it was a wise move," declared Burridge with satisfaction. "Young Ide would have spent a fortune gettin' back that stallion. Well, he sure was grand hossflesh. I only looked at him once. If I'd looked twice I'd been a hoss thief, too."

Lacy asked, "Stagg did you see any of the Hatts?"

"Sure. They was all home, an' had company, too. Strangers to me."

"Did you tell them about takin' Red back to the Ide ranch?"

"Sure. An' I rubbed it in, too. Elam's no hoss thief. He said hoss-stealin' was a low-down bizness. But Cedar swore there was somethin' crooked about a gunman an' rustler who returned stolen property. Also he swore he'd steal the red stallion again, jest to spite you."

"Ahuh. Wal, what did Cedar say when he heahed I'd shot his pard, Burt Stillwell?" inquired Jim in a dry, caustic tone.

"What?" queried Stagg, with a start. "You shot Burt?"

Lacy nodded coldly, eyeing the fire.

"Burt's dead—then?" asked Stagg presently.

Cash Burridge broke the strange spell of the moment.

"Burt's under the sod an' the leaves,

waitin' the Judgment Day. An' it was a damn good job, Stagg."

"No arguin' ag'in' thet," returned Stagg, recovering to grin. "Wal, Lacy, fact is Cedar Hatt hadn't heerd no more'n me. But if you're curious, I can sure tell you—Cedar will be hoppin' mad."

"I told Jim that," said Burridge impatiently. "What's it amount to, anyhow? There'll be a Hatt less *pronto*."

"Wal, pards, the population of this hyar Arizonie is sure deterioratin'," returned Stagg with a guffaw.

The next day six men, with as many pack horses, started over the rim on the trail down into the brakes. It was a trail that would cause even the most expert and daring rider to hesitate before attempting it on horseback. Moreover, it was seldom used. Lacy decided it must be a rear outlet from the rendezvous of desperate men.

But though very steep, it was not long. It let out into the head of a canyon where the stream gushed forth from under an amber-mossed cliff, and went singing down through a winding defile, surely the most beautiful that Jim Lacy's eye had ever beheld.

"Cash, tell me," said Lacy, when they rode abreast, "is Cedar Hatt the haid of this Pine Tree outfit?"

"Hell, no!" ejaculated Burridge. Then as an afterthought he continued, "But, Jim, I don't *know* he isn't. I mean I've sense enough to figure he couldn't be. There's a real man at the reins of that gang."

"You're square now? You honestly don't know?"

"So help me Heaven!" returned Burridge, raising his gloved right hand. "If I knew I'd tell you—even though the man was my pard. But I don't know. I never met a man who did. Of course no one is goin' to brag about that. The Pine Tree outfit is only three years old. It's got a brand, but sure no one ever seen it on a steer or a calf. I never seen it on anythin'. I hear it's cut on aspen trees. Sheepherders will tell you that."

"Cedar Hatt might belong to it?" queried Lacy.

"Sure. But he'd be a bad *hombre* to trust, unless you had some hold on him. My idea of the Pine Tree outfit is this. Some slick rustler from other parts has ridden in here, either with a few choice men or picked them care-

fully after he got here, an' he has the money an' the brains to control a small outfit. Some cowboy found a stray steer on the range. It had its brand painted out. Painted! That's new. But how the devil could they paint out the brands on a big bunch of wild steers?"

"Not very practical," observed Jim.

"It's no trick to steal cattle in this country, an' it's a heap sight easier to sell them," declared Burridge. "But to do it on a big scale an' not be found out—I call that brains."

When they rode around a high green corner Jim gave vent to an exclamation of utmost pleasure. The brake opened into an oval valley surrounded by gray-cliffed and green-thicketed walls, rising high. A level meadow, where horses and cows grazed in deep grass, ended in a low bench of land, upon which huge isolated pines and spruces towered halfway to the rim. Two log cabins stood picturesquely at the edge of this rise of ground. In the background a corral and barn, with logs awry and roof caved in, showed half hidden in a blaze of golden aspens.

"Here's where the Hatts hang out," remarked Burridge. "It's like a fox den, with two holes. The one we just came down, an' a pass below where a couple of good shots could stave off all the cowboys in Arizona."

"Beautiful!" ejaculated Jim. "What do these Hatts live on?"

"Meat an' beans an' corn meal. An' they make their own whisky. If you take a swill of that it'll knock you flat."

"How many womenfolks?"

"Only the kid—Rose. Well, old sharp-eyed Elam sees us already. He's comin' out with a gun."

The riders in advance drove the pack horses up on the bench, and followed to dismount. Burridge arrived a little in advance of Jim. The old mountaineer, Hatt, stood shaggy-headed, with a smile of welcome on his craggy face.

"Howdy, Elam. Shake hands with Jim Lacy."

"Howdy, sir! Reckon you ain't no stranger, by name," responded Hatt, offering his hand.

Lacy leaned off his horse to accept Hatt's advance. "Shore glad to meet you, Elam," he drawled. "Reckon I fell in love with your homestead, heah. An' I'll hang around till you kick me out."

"Welcome you air," said Hatt genially. "We keep open house fer our friends. Git down an' come in."

Burridge made no offer to introduce Jim to the other Hatts present, though he called them by name. Tobe and Henny. Cedar Hatt did not put in an appearance, nor did Lacy's quick eye sight the girl—Rose.

"Throw yer packs back in the grove," said Hatt. "Jest turn your hosses loose. Never yit had a hoss leave hyar."

While horses were led back toward the aspen grove Elam Hatt walked with Burridge, and the two sons followed. Elam was a rough, sturdy backwoodsman who had, no doubt, lived by hunting until an easier vocation had presented with the ranging of cattle along the Mogollons. The two sons, however, exhibited nothing to impress favorably. They were uncouth, unshaven louts with bad teeth and pale eyes, and faces that indicated very low mentality. Lacy's advent manifestly did not cause them either apprehension or interest. Tobe was barefooted. Henny leaned on a short carbine, worn shiny from long service.

"Where's Cedar?" inquired Burridge casually.

"He's hyarabouts somewhere," replied Elam. "He seen you fust."

"Hope Cedar won't take exception to our comin'."

"No tellin' what Cedar'll take," replied Hatt with a grin. "But I'm right glad to see you. Make yourself to home. I'll go an' see about grub. Tobe, whar's your sister?"

"I dunno," replied the son.

"Find her, you terbaccer-chewin' cub," returned Hatt, and strode away toward the cabins.

Tobe Hatt might never have heard his father, for all the attention he paid to the order. Instead he gravitated toward Lacy.

"Got any smokin'?" he asked.

"Shore. Help yourself there in my saddlebag," replied Lacy.

The other young Hatt, Henny, now moved out of his tracks, and dragging the rifle butt over the ground, he joined Tobe in a search of Lacy's saddlebag. Finding the tobacco, they availed themselves of Lacy's offer—they took it all.

"Cash, where you goin' to bunk?" asked Lacy presently.

"Right here in the aspens. Elam will offer the loft of the big cabin, but I'd just as lief be out."

"Wal, I'd a good deal rather," drawled Jim. "Cabin lofts are full of dirt, spiders, centipedes, an' smoke. I'll throw my outfit somewhere aboot."

"Make it within call, Jim, ' replied Burridge, not without significance.

Jim sat down, ostensibly to mend one of his stirrups, but as a matter of fact he did not care to pick out his bed site under the pale eyes of these degenerate Hatt boys. He could peer through the eyes of men to their minds. Either Tobe or Henny would commit murder for a sack of tobacco. Jim decided he would carry his bed to a secluded place in the brush and change that place every night.

"Wal, fellers, what about goin' on with our little game?" inquired Hubrigg.

"Sure," replied Brann.

Cash Burridge shook his head dubiously, but did not voice his opinion until the Hatt boys had ambled off out of hearing.

"Say, men, I don't want to be a killjoy, but honest I question the sense of showin' all that money here."

"Why not?" asked Hubrigg.

"It might not be safe. We don't belong to this Hatt outfit. They could have this canyon 'most full of backwoodsmen in no time. There's only six of us."

"Wal, listen to him!" ejaculated Brann. "You got it wrong, Cash. There's five of us, an' Jim Lacy!"

"I just don't think it's wise," added Burridge stubbornly, ignoring the sarcasm. "Jim, what do you say?"

"Wal, seein that money changes hands so often, I reckon nobody'd miss it if the Hatts did get it," chuckled Jim.

"Haw! Haw!" roared Cash, slapping his knee.

"Miss it!" ejaculated Brann, evidently confronted with catastrophe. "Say, I look on thet pile as mine."

"Jim, you seem a nice feller, with fun in your talk, but I'm sort of doubtful about you," said Hubrigg.

"How so?" queried Jim pleasantly.

"Wal, I can't exactly explain. But when you talk lazy an' easy, like all you darn Texans, an' look some other way, I always feel queer."

"Right you are. Our new member makes me feel like a feller who's runnin' like hell an' knows sure he's goin'

to get the seat of his pants slung full of buckshot."

This from Brann indicated the slow progress of the rustlers toward amity with Jim. They all laughed uproariously.

"Shore I must be a likable cuss to have round," declared Jim presently. "I've a notion to get sore."

"Wal, for Gawd's sake, don't," burst out Brann. "Be a good feller an' set in the game with us."

"All right, I'll set in a few hands," said Jim good-naturedly. "Anyway, till I'm broke."

"Jim, your credit is good in this outfit," interposed Cash Burridge. "An', anyway, you'll have a gunny sack full of money before long."

Whereupon the rustlers, in high spirits, repaired to the shade of a pine in front of Elam's cabin, and squatting round a blanket, emptied their pockets of coin and bills. Jim joined them, choosing a seat from which he could watch the cabins and the approach of anyone.

The game was draw poker, the stakes any amount a player chose to wager, provided he produced it. Jim knew he could hold his own with these gamblers, but he preferred to lose the ill-gotten gains Burridge had forced upon him as his share of their first rustling deal together. So Jim played recklessly, making his losses more than discount the ridiculously lucky cards he held at times. His apparently casual glances at the cabin, however, were not few and far between.

The Hatt boys came to watch the game, soon growing equally absorbed with the gamblers. Old Elam came presently, and likewise fell to the attraction of the game.

Elam Hatt's house was one of the picturesque double-cabined structures under one roof, with wide porch space between. The porch ran all along the front of both cabins, and one end was littered with saddles and packs. Deer and elk antlers on the walls supported rifles and bridles. The left cabin was smaller than the other, evidently consisting of only one room. The window, without glass or shutter, opened toward Jim, who had been quick to see a face peer from the darkness and draw back again.

When he caught sight of it again he knew at once that it belonged to Rose Hatt and that she had espied him.

"Elam, do you know draw poker?" asked Jim presently.

"Tolerable. I wisht I hed stake enough to set in this hyar game. I'd bust somebody," replied old Hatt.

"Play a few hands for me," said Jim, rising. "Change my luck, maybe. I want a drink."

"Whisky?"

"No. Water. Where'll I get it?"

"Thar inside the kitchen door at the end of the porch," replied Hatt, rising with alacrity to take Jim's place.

As Jim neared the porch, Rose came out of the cabin where he had seen her, and crossed to enter the other. She wore buckskin. He caught the flash of brown bare legs and feet. Jim went down the porch and entered the door mentioned by Hatt. As he expected, he encountered Rose. Despite excitement manifest in her face, he thought she looked clearer of eye and skin, somehow prettier.

"Howdy, Rose! You see I've come," he said. "I want a drink, please."

She filled a dipper from a pail and handed it to hom. Facing her and standing in the door, Jim drank the water thirstily.

"Will it be all right if I talk to you?" asked Jim.

"Sure. 'Cept when Cedar's around."

"Where is he?"

"Reckon he's hidin' somewhere, watchin' you-all. So we can't talk now. But, oh! I've so much to tell you!"

"Yes? Tell me a little—quick," said Jim.

"Marvie's to fetch Hettie Ide—to meet me," whispered the girl. "Oh, she must be an angel! He says she will give me a home—if I can ever get away from here."

"Wal, now, that's fine," sympathized Jim, vibrating to this news. "*Three* friends now—Marvie an' Hettie Ide an' me. Lucky girl!"

"I can't thank God enough," she breathed from a full breast.

"Keep on thankin', an' fightin'," said Jim, with ring of voice and meaning smile. Then he set down the dipper on the bench and backed out of the door, eyes still intent on Rose. She was flushed of face now, eager, hopeful, yet still fearful.

"I will. They can't stop me now—unless they kill me," she answered resolutely.

"Who're 'they,' Rose?"

"Cedar, for one. I told you," she replied haltingly.

"Tell me the other man."

"Oh, I daren't—I daren't," Rose faltered.

"If you love Marvie—an' if *she* will stand by you—you can dare," he shot at her relentlessly. Then, "Rose, that other man is Clan Dillon?"

"Yes—yes," she whispered in unutterable relief. "Are—are you to be here long?"

"Days, maybe weeks."

"Keep watch," begged the girl, finding courage. "Cedar will drag me off in the woods—to meet Dillon. If he does—follow us, for God's sake."

"I shore will, Rose. Don't lose your nerve."

"But be *careful*, Cedar's an Indian in the woods."

Jim Lacy leisurely turned, and strolled back to the gamesters.

"How comes the luck, Elam?" he asked.

"My Gord! Won three hands straight runnin'," ejaculated Hatt. "An' one a fat jackpot."

"Wal, shore reckoned you'd change my luck. Play 'em for all you're worth, Elam, an' if you break this outfit I'll divvy with you."

"Ha! he's got no chanct on earth, Jim," said Cash. "Better set back in before we break you."

Old Elam held his own, however. Jim watched for a while, much amused, until his ever-roving glance fastened upon a newcomer to the scene.

A man had come out of the aspen thicket. He carried a rifle, which he held by the barrel over his shoulder. His gait, his build, betrayed him to Jim Lacy. This was Cedar Hatt.

Upon nearer view Cedar Hatt turned out to possess only the walk and the shape of the Hatt family. He was darker than any of them with beardless face of clear brown tan, small glittering eyes set close, black as coal, and of a strange intensity, sharp nose and sharp chin, with a slit between for a mouth. He wore his hair long and it curled dark from under an old slouch hat full of bullet holes. His garb was greasy buckskin, from head to toe. There was a knife in his belt, but no shells for the rifle.

Cedar Hatt stood across from the circle of gamblers, and dropping the muzzle of his rifle upon his moccasined

foot he leaned on it, and gave his restless sloe-black eyes scope of all present. At length Cedar put the toe of his moccasin against his father. Elam looked up with a start.

"Hullo! You back, Cedar?"

The son made an almost imperceptible movement with his right hand toward Lacy.

"Cedar, say howdy to Jim Lacy," went on Hatt, a little hurriedly. "Lacy this hyar's my son Cedar."

Jim nodded civilly, without speaking, and he received even less in response. A look, like a streak of black lightning, flashed over him from head to toe—then Cedar Hatt deigned him no more attention.

It was a singular thing for Jim Lacy to meet men; and in a case like this, when he knew before he had seen Cedar Hatt that he was going to kill him, the incident seemed extraordinarily potent and strange. Lacy needed only the slightest glimpse at Hatt's eyes to know that he had not yet learned of the killing of Burt Stillwell. After that instant the meeting became only ordinary for Jim, inasmuch as Hatt could never again be formidable face to face. Jim knew him now. It was the unfamiliar that men of Lacy's caliber always reckoned with.

Finally Cedar Hatt, without ever having uttered a word, shouldered his rifle, and stalked away with the spring of a deer hunter in his stride. He went up the canyon to disappear around the green bend.

Whereupon Lacy strolled away himself, into the golden shade of the aspen thicket, and on through darker shade to the lichened base of the cliff. He flung himself down here and leaned against the wall. Jim Lacy had come there into the obscurity and loneliness of the thicket to think, to plan, to plot, to work out a course he could inevitably follow. But how useless that was! The slightest accident or incident might change the best of his plans. If he decided on a definite thing his mind would be set. His task demanded more than that; and it involved infinite patience and sacrifice, incredible command of geniality and good-fellowship with these rustlers, sight and sense that must grasp every little clue which might lead to the success of his venture. All this when his spirit revolted and his nature demanded quick, hard, fierce action!

After supper, which was served on the porch between the two cabins, Elam Hatt scraped his rude seat back and arose.

"You-all who want to gamble air welcome, but I reckon some of you will want to set in to a confab with me."

He went into his cabin, followed by Burridge and Lacy. The large room was dark. Hatt stirred the slumbering embers in the huge yellow-stone fireplace and put on chips of wood.

The door opened to admit Cedar Hatt, who advanced with his sliding silent step, to seat himself on a bench in the shadow beside the old stone chimney.

"Burridge, if thar's a lead weight on yore chest, shove it off," invited Elam.

"Are you open to a big deal?" queried the rustler bluntly.

"Always open to anythin'. But I'm careful not to change the minds of ranchers about Elam Hatt," replied the backwoodsman shrewdly.

"Which means they think you do some two-bit brandin' of mavericks,

like any cowboy, but you never tackle a real rustlin' job?"

"Reckon thet's the size of it, Cash."

"An' that's exactly why I'm goin' to spring this deal on you. No one will ever lay it to you an' everyone will lay it to the Pine Tree outfit. Savvy? The time's just ripe. The trap's set. We can't do it half so well without you an' your sons. We don't know the country. Otherwise you bet we wouldn't let you or anyone else in on it."

"Sounds good. I'm listenin'."

"Tom Day an' Franklidge have throwed a big herd of stock together. Some of it's workin' with Ben Ide's big herd, the last of his stock, in what the sheepherders call Silver Meadows. They're high an' won't be comin' down before the fall roundup, along first of October. Now while them cattle are high up we plan to drive them—*on up over the Rim*—an' down into the Basin, where we could sell a hundred times as many head, with never a question asked. I've already got the buyer. To do the job right an' quick we need more riders, an' particular some who know how to find fast travelin' through them bad canyons up to the Rim. That's all. I leave it to you to call the turn on that deal."

"How do you know Ide's stock air runnin' on Silver Meadows? Thet's Day's range."

"I know because I saw them an' they used to be my cattle."

"How much stock thar now?"

"We can bunch three or four thousand head in half a day, an' land them over the Rim in less'n two days."

"An' you've got a buyer?"

"Waitin' an' willin'. He's drivin' ten thousand head to Maricopa. How easy to run in a few more thousand!"

"Looks too powerful easy to me," returned Hatt, as if sagging under an overpowering weight.

"Easy an' safe. An' listen, Elam. Twenty dollars a head. In gold! One yellow old double-eagle for every steer!"

Elam Hatt paced the rough-hewn logs that constituted the floor of his cabin.

"Cedar, what d'ye say?" he asked suddenly, in hoarse low voice.

"Burridge, swear them steers air in Silver Meadows," said Cedar Hatt.

"Sure I swear. Three days ago. An' the grass an' water are fine. They'll work higher for several more days. Ask Jim Lacy here. Reckon you'll not be intimatin' he's a liar."

"Talk up, Jim Lacy, if you're a rustler."

"Wal, I was with Burridge. I saw the cattle," replied Lacy.

Cedar Hatt glided into the light of the fire.

"Papa, with ten riders I can run them cattle over the Rim in one day," he declared. How grotesque and striking the epithet he gave his father! He seemed the epitome of lawlessness, of the hardened rustler, yet acknowledged the endearing claim of blood.

"Thet settles it, then," returned Elam Hatt, throwing up his hands as one whose price had been met.

"Hold on! Thar ain't no Mex herder in these brakes who'd lead thet drive. An' I'm the only white man who kin."

"Wal, what's makin' you yap so? It's settled, ain't it, 'cept the workin' out?"

"I want my pard, Burt Stillwell, in on this."

"Reckon *I* see no kick to thet."

Cedar Hatt faced round with the swift, sinister action peculiar to him. "Anythin' ag'in' Stillwell?"

"Wal, not any more, Hatt," drawled Jim. "I shore had a little grudge, but it's gone. When I saw Burt last, I shore had a friendly feelin' for him."

"Burridge, you had no use for the Stillwells. How're you standin' on this hyar deal I want?"

"Cedar, all I say is, sure—ring your pard Burt in—if you can get him," returned Burridge, with something unnatural in his tone. And he stepped more into the shadow.

"Papa," hissed Cedar Hatt, and that word inspired awe as well as mirth, "I'm double-crossin' the Pine Tree outfit to make us all rich on this big job."

"Air you drunk, son?" asked Hatt, slowly rising to his feet. "How'n tarnation can you double-cross them—onless you mean beatin' them to the deal?"

"Me an' Burt belong to the Pine Tree outfit."

Chapter Fifteen

"*That Sort of Limp Look*"

A WEEK later to the day, about the middle of the afternoon, Jim Lacy stood with Cash Burridge on the Mogollon Rim, facing south over the magnificent wilderness of southern Arizona.

"My Gord! listen to that!" ejaculated Burridge ecstatically. "Grandest music on earth!"

"Cash, they'll greet you in Hades some day with that music," drawled Jim.

Yellow dust palls hung over the steep Maricopa trail, where it jumped zigzag off the Rim and wound down into the green depths. A mighty roar of trampling hoofs and bellowing cattle and whooping riders waved up from that hot slope. It seemed an avalanche of sound now softening and again swelling, wild and free, harmonious with the country which made it possible.

"Lacy, it's all over but the fireworks," said Cash exultantly.

"*Quien sabe?* It might fetch some fireworks you're not figurin' on," admonished his companion.

"Not much. We're shakin' the dust of the brakes. Say, won't Ben Ide an' Tom Day bite nails? Biggest drive I ever had a hand in. An' all so easy! All like clockwork! All in a couple of days too despite that—yellow traitor, Cedar Hatt!"

"Shore we didn't need him," responded Lacy thoughtfully.

"Jim, I've seen some mad *hombres* in my time, but that Cedar Hatt beats them all to hell," declared Burridge, aghast at the memory.

"Shore he was mad. Didn't I warn you to keep your outfit from givin' it away aboot Stillwell?"

"Yes, you did, an' I talked myself hoarse. But it couldn't be kept. They *hated* Cedar, an' the minute somebody got two drinks aboard he up an' blows that Burt Stillwell was dead. It sure made a hydrophobia-coyote out of Cedar. But he didn't know *who* shot Burt. When he spit questions at you, like a snake with a hunch, why didn't you lie?"

"Wal, Cash, I reckon you don't savvy me."

"Why didn't you kill him, then?"

"I just aboot did," returned Lacy reflectively. "But I saw he didn't have the nerve to draw—so I waited."

"Ahuh! Waited? I got your hunch. Cedar knows somethin' you're keen to find out. Bet it's that Pine Tree outfit."

"Cash, you're figurin' fair. But on the daid square now—rememberin' the favors I've done you—cain't you tell me somethin' aboot that outfit? Shore you have some suspicion aboot who leads them?"

"Honest to Gawd, Lacy, I haven't even an idee!" returned Burridge, with truth in look and voice. "It might be Judge Franklidge himself."

"Holy Moses! Cash, that's a wild guess!" ejaculated Lacy.

"Sure. An' it's only a guess. But you can gamble all the coin you're goin' to get *pronto* that the Pine Tree boss is not hidin' in the brakes, like the rest of us rustlers. He's an honest member of range society. Ha! Ha! Yes he is! Jim, there might be a combine of homesteaders an' ranchers in cahoots with an outfit of great riders like Burt Stillwell an' Cedar Hatt. What's it to you, anyway, Jim?"

"Reckon I've got to put my brand on the boss of the Pine Trees," said Lacy.

"Ah! Is *that* all? Hell! I thought you might have some interest in him," retorted Cash sarcastically. "Jim, on the square, if you hadn't done so much to straighten me out again, I'd have suspicions about you."

"Wal, keep them in your haid."

Burridge laughed, and gathering up his bridle swung into the saddle.

"Come on. I don't want the outfit to get far ahead. You'll be hearin' the clink of gold before sundown."

"Not me, Cash."

"What?"

"I'm not goin' any farther with you."

The rustler exhibited profound concern and amazement. "You're not goin' any farther—what—?"

"Say, Cash, are you out of your haid?" queried Jim testily.

Burridge studied his companion for a long moment, his face working. Regret began to erase the incredulity.

"What the hell are you goin' to do?"

"That's my concern now. I'm through."

"Through! But, Jim—"

"Didn't I help you out of a bad hole—the worst you was ever in?"

"You sure did, Jim. An' I—"

"Didn't I rustle cattle with you? Didn't I come out in the open—so everybody on this range will know I helped steal Ben Ide's cattle?"

"By Heaven! you did!" declared Burridge, with redder face. "An' I hold that against you, Jim. I just can't figure why you did that. We could sure have laid that onto the Pine Tree outfit."

"Wal, neither Ben Ide nor any other honest rancher will know *you* had the high hand in this big cattle steal. But my name an' my hand in it will be known. I saw to that. They'll think *I* am the boss of the Pine Tree outfit."

"I'm damned! Jim Lacy, you're too deep for me. But I'm gettin' a hunch. How about your share in the divvy for this deal?"

"You're welcome to it. Take it an' go out of this country. Try bein' honest again. You might succeed next time. But don't ever come back heah!"

"Why not, Jim?"

"Because if you do I'll kill you," flashed Lacy, in a voice that cut like a whip.

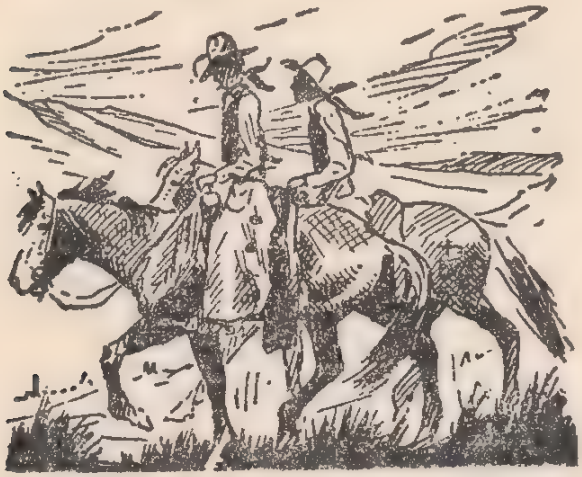
The ruddy heat left Burridge's face, and he began to nod his head, slowly, with increasing motion.

"*Jim—Lacy!*" he said huskily. "You been a pard to me, whatever your reasons. I don't care a damn what they were. I'll leave this country. Here's my hand on it. Good-by an' good luck!"

"Same to you, Cash," replied Jim, as they gripped hands.

Burridge wheeled his horse so violently that it reared and plunged, and then slid to its haunches in the soft ground where the trail broke over the Rim. Burridge hauled it up and used his spurs. The animal snorted and took the first descent on a jump, then steadied to a quick walk. At the first bend of the trail into the timber the rustler looked back up to the Rim.

"I'll send my compliments to Cedar Hatt an' his boss in hell!"



Jim Lacy's intention was to return to Hatt's ranch, if possible without encountering even a sheepherder. Hatt had left his daughter Rose alone. Elam, of course, with his two sons, could be expected to get back home from the cattle drive in two days from the time Jim had left them, or even less. As for Cedar Hatt, who had deserted Burridge and Elam after the revelation of Stillwell's death, no doubt he had rushed to the secret rendezvous of the Pine Tree men, wherever that was, there to betray to them news of the impending drive of the Ide stock. It was Cedar Hatt whom Lacy had greatest interest in, at the present stage of the game; and Cedar was most likely to be found at or near home.

There was reason, too, for Lacy to have an interview with Rose Hatt, from whom he expected to force more about the man who dominated her brother.

Jim did not think it wise to go near Silver Meadows, where the cattle had been collected for the great drive; and therefore he made a wide detour, hoping to strike the trail he and the rustler band had made coming from Hatt's ranch. But he had to go into camp the second night of his journey without having come to this trail. On the third morning, however, he struck the trail he was looking for, and he back-tracked it all day. On the following day it failed on high ridges, on hard ground, rocky flats, and pine-needle mats, over which Elam Hatt had led the rustlers for the express purpose of hiding their tracks.

Lacy wasted no time trying to recover them. Sure of his direction now, he pressed on rapidly, and the next afternoon struck the deep canyon east of the one in which Hatt lived.

Jim took the precaution to ride well back from the Rim, peeping over whenever opportunity offered from behind foliage or rock covert. He did not really expect to see anyone, but that did not influence his actions. Lacy was always cautious, watchful, alert. Presently, down in an open bend of the deep canyon he caught a glimpse of a rider. He was riding slowly up the trail, leaning down from his saddle, evidently with eyes on the ground.

"Trackin' somethin'," muttered Jim. "Now I wonder who that is an' what he's trackin'."

Lacy rode back away from the Rim, and urged his horse to a lope, careful to avoid rocks and brush. He covered

a mile or more in short order, then again approached the Rim.

This time he dismounted and cautiously stole to a vantage-point, from which he could peer unseen. As luck would have it, there was an open grassy meadow, narrow and long, just beneath his position. The canyon was five hundred feet deep at this point, green-walled, precipitous, and unsurmountable.

Lacy watched so long without seeing the rider that he believed he had been too late to catch him crossing this open flat. But as Lacy had about decided to hurry on again, the man emerged from the lower end.

Horse and rider grew strangely familiar as they came nearer. Lacy's iron nerves were not beyond a tiny burning thrill.

"Am I drunk or loco?" he muttered.

On the rider came, his horse at a trot, and still he bent over to one side, studying tracks in the trail. This rider was not tracking a lost horse or deer or turkey. He was a man-hunter.

"*Cedar Hatt!*" whispered Lacy. "Talk about luck! I'm shore smothered with it. But bad for you, Cedar—you treacherous soul!"

Lacy watched the man with a strained, piercing gaze, as if it were possible to divine his motive.

This might be the trail Marvie Blaine rides when he comes to meet Rose, soliloquized Jim ponderingly. *Shore it is. She said the brake east of where she lived.*

Cedar Hatt rode on, directly under Jim's position, and once he halted his horse, to lean far down from his saddle. How like an Indian! Then he swung up again to peer ahead, as if calculating on something. He made a dark wild figure, suiting his ragged horse and the background of tangled brush and rugged wall. Then he rode on, more slowly.

"By God!" burst out Lacy. "That *hombre* is sure trackin' Marvie Blaine!"

Lacy crawled back from the Rim, then rose to run for his horse. He would head off this rustler. Luckily the lower part of the canyon was miles below the locality where Rose was in the habit of meeting young Blaine. Lacy had time to get ahead and find a place where he could descend to the floor of the canyon. Working still farther back from the Rim, he put his horse to a gallop and made a hard fast ride for several miles. Then he slowed down and headed for the Rim again. No break in sight where he might descend! The wall grew more precipitous and higher.

At length Lacy came upon an intersecting canyon, a narrow crack which ran off into the woods. He rode back to where it headed in one of the thickest ravines, so common to the country. He descended as far as possible, then dismounting, he tied his horse and hurried on. This gorge deepened into a split between toppling walls, so rough that there was not even a deer trail. But Lacy, sparing no effort, traversed it, to reach the main canyon hot and bruised and out of breath.

Under cover of the oak thicket that lined the slope from the wall he rested a few moments, listening like a pursued deer. Only the distant murmur of a stream and the moan of wind up on the timbered ruins came to his ears.

Reckon I'll slip down to the trail an' hold Cedar up, soliloquized Jim. *But I'd shore like to know what he's aboot.*

The east side of the canyon was a gentle slope, covered with white grass, brown ferns, and low pines and oaks,

affording perfect cover for anyone hiding. Lacy worked gradually down toward the level of the canyon. At each little opening he peered out before advancing. Often he stopped to listen.

It was through this extreme caution and the eye of a woodsman that Lacy came upon Marvie Blaine and Rose Hatt.

They were locked in each other's arms, lost in the enchantment of their dream. But they had chosen a secluded nook, halfway up the grassy pine-dotted slope, from which they could see, by peering under the low-spreading branches, both up and down the trail. At this moment, however, they would not have become aware of the approach of an army.

Lacy seemed struck to the heart by their rapture and the poignant pang that rent his own breast. He understood. He knew the sweetness and glory of love. Lacy sank to his knees, feeling that he had no right to interrupt their sacred hour. Marvie bent over Rose, whose head lay back upon his breast, with her face upturned to his, eyes closed, heavy-lidded, rapt and dreamy. Both bliss and tragedy seemed to hover over these youthful lovers.

Suddenly Lacy heard a sound that cruelly disrupted both the pain and the joy he felt. In a flash he found his equilibrium. What was that sound? He listened, while his eyes roved everywhere. Marvie was deaf to sounds. No doubt there was a beautiful bell ringing in his soul. Rose lay entranced.

Again Jim heard a sound, which he calculated to be a swish from the tail of a horse. Of course Marvie and Rose had their horses tethered somewhere near. But the first noise had not been like the second. All at once an idea flashed to Jim—buckskin over rock! Cedar Hatt always wore buckskin. Close at hand there were corners of cliff, ledges, huge slabs of rock. The instant that thought stood clear in Lacy's mind he grew stiff, intense in the grasp of a sensation for which he never found an adequate name. It mounted almost to a power of divination. It always brought the icy steadiness to his nerves.

Then from the dark shadow of pines behind Marvie a lithe figure glided. Silently Jim Lacy drew his gun.

Marvie never looked up from the beloved face until Cedar Hatt halted. It was clear to Jim that Cedar's sudden violent check came from the surprise of seeing Rose in Marvie's arms.

Marvie likewise started, so suddenly and rudely that Rose rolled off his shoulder into the grass. She screamed. She swayed up to her knees, and with hands out she backed until the pine tree stopped her.

"So hyar's why you run off from me today?" Cedar shouted fiercely. The muscles of his neck swelled, his lean jaw protruded.

"Don't—don't hurt me—Cedar!" cried Rose in terror.

"I'll beat you half to death. So hyar's why you played sick today an' then run off. You lyin' hussy! Answer me!"

"Yes—yes, Cedar. I—I did," replied Rose, sagging back against the tree.

"This hyar ain't no accident?" he demanded, with a forceful gesture toward the stricken Marvie.

"No. I come—on purpose."

"How long's it b'en goin' on?"

"Weeks. I—I've come eight times."

"Who's this hyar young buck?"

"I'll never tell," flashed Rose.

Marvie stumbled to his feet and stepped forward, livid of face, but resolute. "I'll tell you."

"Don't—don't!" cried Rose. "Never tell him!"

"Who'n hell air you?" queried Cedar.

"I'm Marvie Blaine," answered the lad.

"Blaine! Huh! thet means nothin' to me.'!

"I live with Ben Ide. We're related."

"Ben Ide! Oho! You belong to them rich Ide folks, huh, as wouldn't wipe their feet on sich as us Hatts? Wal, damn your white skin, what you doin' hyar with my sister?"

"I—I love her," answered Marvie manfully.

Cedar knocked him down.

"I'll kick your guts out," he snarled.

Marvie rolled out of reach, leaped to his feet, and came back, with fight struggling to master his consternation and distress for Rose.

"I seen you huggin' an' kissin' Rose. An' you got nerve to say you love her. Playin' with my sister, huh? An' you belong to them Ides!"

"Cedar, it's not—what you think," burst out Rose, with the scarlet dyeing her face.

"Git out, you lyin' little devil. If you'll lie about one thing you'll lie about another. All the time you been meetin' this young buck. Layin' hyar in his arms, huh?"

"You rat!" retorted Rose passionately. "He loves me honest. You're too low-down to understand what that means."

"Didn't I ketch you layin' in his arms?" demanded Cedar harshly.

"Yes, you did. An' you might have ketched me there often," cried the girl.

"Ed Richardson will kill you fer this!" hissed Cedar.

"Let him kill an' be damned!" returned Rose with an equal passion. "I don't belong to him. I hate him. Did he ever talk honest love to me? Bah! But Marvie Blaine did. An' he's made a woman out of me."

"Hatt, I've asked—Rose—to marry—me," interposed Marvie, beside himself with emotion.

"Yes, an! Miss Ide is goin' to give me a decent home till I'm old enough," added Rose.

"Oho! Double-crossin' Ed an' all of us, hey? You black-eyed cat! Git your hoss, an' soon as I take the hide off this kid lover of yours, we'll—"

"Cedar Hatt, you'll have to pack me dead—if you take me one single step. You'll never drag me alive to your Pine Tree—"

"Shut up!" interrupted Cedar, and he struck her down.

Marvie, with furious imprecation, wildly swinging his arms, rushed at Hatt, only to be sent staggering against the tree.

"I'll blow your insides out!" yelled Cedar, reaching for his gun.

But before he could draw, Marvie closed with him, and as Hatt dragged the gun out they began a swift struggle for possession of it. Here Jim bounded out of his covert and down the slope, his gun half leveled. Neither of the contestants was aware of his presence, but Rose saw him, and she shrieked.

Jim tried to get a bead on Cedar. But he had to be sure of his aim. He did not want to risk injuring Marvie. As they whirled and wrestled, Cedar pulled his arm over his head, his hand clutching the gun. Marvie clung desperately to that arm.

Jim took a snap shot at Cedar's gun hand. Missed! He snapped another and the bullet almost tore Cedar's hand off. The gun went flying, while Cedar, backing away from Marvie, cursing, suddenly froze at sight of Jim.

Marvie had not yet seen his savior. No doubt he thought the shots had been fired accidentally in the struggle. Quick as a flash he snatched up Cedar's gun and, leveling it with both hands, he worked the trigger.

Cedar Hatt clutched at his breast. An awful blank surprise rendered his expression once more human. With gasps his mouth opened to emit blood. Then he reeled and fell at Marvie's feet.

Marvie began to sag. The smoking gun dropped from his limp hands. Rose, on her knees, with a red stain on her lips, rocked to and fro, mute with terror.

"Wal, Marvie, that wasn't so bad for a youngster," said Jim, stepping forward. "I was just aboot to plug him myself."

As if a giant arm was grinding him around the lad turned.

"*Who're you?*" he whispered.

"Reckon I'm your old pard, Nevada, of Forlorn River days," replied Jim, and then he grasped Marvie as he collapsed. He embraced him and half carried him toward the trees, where Rose now clung, trying to get to her feet. "Brace up, boy. It's all over. An' you, Rose, buck up. Why, you're both showin' yellow after as game a fight as two kids ever made! That's right. Let him lean against you. Wal, wal!"

Marvie, with eyes starting, cried out, "O, my God—it's you—*Nevada!*"

"Shore is, boy, an' glad to meet you again."

Marvie suddenly seemed to revert to a consciousness that recalled Cedar Hatt. He stared in terror at the prone rustler.

"Nevada, you—you shot him," he said huskily.

"Me? Nope. I only shot his hand off. You see, you was dancin' around so I couldn't bore him."

"He—he's *dead?*"

"Wal, I reckon so. Has that sort of limp look," replied Jim. "But I'll make shore." And Jim rose from his kneeling posture to walk over to Hatt. "Daid as a door nail! Marvie, he was roarin' a minute ago aboot blowin' out your insides. An', lo—there he lays with his own insides blowed out. His own gun! Funny aboot things. Don't look so sick. Wasn't he tryin' to kill you? Wouldn't he have murdered Rose—or worse?"

Marvie sat up, pallid and wet, with his lower lip quivering and his eyes losing their fixed horror.

"Nevada! You were here—somewhere?"

"Shore. I was watchin' you an' Rose make love when Cedar sneaked up. Reckon I ought to have shot him pronto, but I wanted to heah what he'd say."

"Marvie, it's turrible," interposed Rose. "My own brother! But I don't care. I'm glad. He was a devil. Did he hurt you? Oh, there's blood on your hands!"

"I'm not hurt. It come off the gun."

Jim studied these two brave young people and thrilled to his heart. What had guided his steps on this eventful day?

"Rose, I reckon you can never be scared by Cedar again," he said.

"No. Mister Lacy. I'm free—saved."

"*Lacy?*" cried Marvie, starting up incredulously. "But you're Nevada!"

"Son, the Nevada you knew was Jim Lacy."

"My Heaven! what will Ben say? An' Hettie," exclaimed Marvie, overcome.

"Reckon they'll say a lot—when they know. But promise me you won't give me away."

"Aw, Nevada, if you only knew how Ben—"

"Marvie, I'm not askin' you to keep it secret forever," interrupted Jim hastily. "But for a little while. Promise, old pard."

"I—will," replied Marvie, choking.

"An' you, too, Rose?"

"I can keep secrets. An' I mustn't let slip that you're Marvie's old pard Nevada?"

"Shore. An' now, Rose, let's get this confab over. I reckon my hunch is correct. But I need to know more. You told me Dillon is haid of this Pine Tree outfit?"

"Yes, sir," replied Rose. "Some of his men called him Campbell. But he told Cedar his real name was Ed Richardson. He's from New Mexico. He figgered in the Lincoln County war an' was close to Billy the Kid. He fetched rustlers here with him. An' he got hold of Cedar, an' Burt Stillwell, an' Stewart, an' other Arizona riders."

"Rose, how'd you happen on this?" asked Nevada seriously.

"Cedar fetched Clan Dillon to our ranch, an' he tried to make up to me," went on Rose. I liked him first-off. But I soon saw what he was up to an' I had no use for him. Wal, one day Cedar threw me on a horse an' rode me off to a cabin over here in Pinon Brake. Dillon was there. He tried makin' more love to me. But I bit an' kicked an' clawed him. Then he manhandled me bad, with Cedar grinnin' by. He'd have ruined me, too, but the men they was expectin' rode up an' I got thrown in the loft. Some of them were drunk. They all had money. An' they gambled an' stayed up all night. In the mornin' they had a powwow. Then Cedar fetched me back home an' swore he'd kill me if I squealed."

"Clan Dillon, then, is Ed Richardson —haid of this Pine Tree outfit," said Nevada, "an' Ben Ide's foreman."

"Yes, sir," replied Rose bravely.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Marvie. "Ben swears by Dillon. He's gone against Raidy, his oldest hand. Gee! I wouldn't want to be in Dillon's boots when Ben finds out!"

"Wal, Marvie, it's likely that Dillon's boots will be stickin' out straight when Ben heahs the truth. Rose, is there any particular reason why you'd like to go back home again? Clothes or anythin' you care for?"

"All the duds I own are on my back," replied Rose ruefully. "Cedar burned my pretty dance dress—that I bought to look nice for Marvie. My pony's all I have. An' he's here."

"Marvie, get your horse an' put Rose on hers an' leave heah *pronto* for the Ide ranch. Look sharp an' don't run into any riders. When you reach home turn Rose over to Hettie, an' both of you keep your mouths shut."

His compelling force wrung mute promises from both Marvie and the girl. Marvie started to lead Rose away, when he espied Cedar Hatt's gun lying on the brown pine needles.

"Nevada—can I take it?" he queried haltingly.

"What? Oh, Cedar's gun? Shore you take it. An' hurry along."

Nevada did not linger to watch them find and mount their horses; however, as he started up the slope he heard them, and felt that now all would be well with them. He climbed as one with wings. Reaching his horse, he tightened the cinches, leaped astride, and rode up to the level, where he faced north with a grim smile.

At a steady lope he covered the miles

of forested ridge, downhill and easy going until he descended into the brakes. Here his horse toiled for an hour, at last to crash out into the trail. One glance at the bare ground showed him that Marvie and Rose had not yet come so far. He preferred to reach the Ide ranch before they did.

Five miles of travel and then a hard climb took Nevada out of the brakes into the beautiful stately forest, where the pines thinned and straggled to the desert sage. How sweet the fragrance! The trail grew broad and sandy, so that his speeding horse thudded almost noiselessly on. Clumps of spruce and low branches of pines obscured the bends.

Nevada rode around an abrupt green curve almost to run down a horse coming toward him. He pulled his mount to a sliding halt. He heard a cry. The rider was a woman. Hettie Ide!

Chapter Sixteen

Cleaned Out!

"HETTIE," said Ben Ide as he stood on the porch and spread his arms to the glorious beauty and color of the Arizona landscape. "I once thought Forlorn River in the fall was pretty close to heaven. But Cedar Springs Ranch has it beaten a mile."

"Long ago, before this wonderful autumn came, I was faithless to California," muttered Hettie.

"Hettie, not faithless! I don't love the old home country any the less because I've learned to love this more. Lord knows I've reason to hate Arizona. But I can't. It grows on me. Here it's way in September. Frost an' ice every mornin'. Indian-summer days. Look at the patches of gold an' scarlet back up in the woods."

"It's very beautiful."

"Sister, we mustn't forget that Mother is to be taken to San Diego for the winter months."

"I've not forgotten, Ben. But there's no hurry. This weather is perfect. Mr. Day claims it'll last till Christmas."

"Well, if it does, I could ask no more," said Ben. "Then I'll send Mother with you an' Ina an' the kid to San Diego till spring. But I'll stay on here. I'd be afraid to leave."

"It wouldn't be wise, Ben. Things have grown from bad to worse. I fear you are in for more shocks."

"Tom Day says they must grow worse before they get better. Heigho! Well, I'm not lettin' disappointment sour me, anyhow."

"Disappointment? You mean—about ranching in Arizona?"

"Between you an' me, Hettie, I wasn't thinkin' of cattle at all," replied Ben sadly.

Hettie suffered a contraction of her heart. If Ben knew what she knew! She prayed that he never would.

Marvie Blaine sat on the porch step, morosely cleaning his rifle, which evidently he had used that day. The lad had grown taller, thinner, more of a man these last few weeks.

"Marv, you don't ride far away when you hunt, do you?" queried Ben.

"Lots of turkey an' deer right in our back yard," answered Marvie.

"Seems to me you take a lot of time off, an' I'm supposed to pay you a cowboy's salary."

"I do the work given me. Dillon sure slights me on every job he can."

"Weren't you pretty smart-alec?" asked Ben.

"I wasn't until he got mean."

"An' when was that? Are you sure you don't imagine things? Dillon is the kindest of foremen."

Marvie looked up deliberately. "Dillon used to like me. But he changed after the cowboys told him how I'd made up to little Rose Hatt at the dance in Winthrop."

"Rose Hatt! I saw her once. What on earth could it be to Dillon if you did flirt with Rose? As a matter of fact, he was merely worried about you. Rose was no girl for you to get friendly with."

"Say, did Dillon tell you that?" queried Marvie, flushing.

"Yes. An' he advised me to put a stop to it. Said you might get in trouble."

Marvie jumped up as if he had been stung by a hornet.

"Ha! Ha!" he burst out, striding away with his head back. "Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"Well, I'll be doggoned," ejaculated Ben, gazing at Hettie for confirmation of his fears. "Was that boy givin' me the horselaugh?"

"He was surely giving you some kind of a laugh."

"Hettie, am I growin' old, thick-headed, absent-minded?" inquired Ben wistfully.

"No, Ben," returned his sister, dropping her head. "You've only the worry of the ranch on your mind."

"By George! it is a worry. But, old girl, you've not been so bright an' happy as you were here at first. Neither is Ina. I'm afraid I've done bad by both of you."

"Ben, it will all come right," spoke up Hettie, forcing a smile.

"Hettie, do you still think of—of—*him?*" asked Ben, in lower tone.

"Always," she replied, quaking inwardly. If only she had the courage and the wit to keep her secret hidden!

"I'm afraid I've given up hope," went on Ben somberly. "An' it's taken the sap out of me. I'm fallin' into the same rut as I was in last spring, over home on Tule Lake."

"Given up hope of what?" murmured Hettie.

"Of ever findin' Nevada," he replied simply, as if the name was not one he never mentioned. "That's why I came to Arizona. Once at Forlorn River, when I asked Nevada what he'd do if anythin' separated us, he said he'd go to Arizona an' take to hard ridin'. I never forgot. Well, I reckon every cowboy on these ranges has hit me for a job. But sure not one of them was Nevada, nor had they ever heard of him. I reckon he's dead. Don't you ever think that, Hettie?"

"Yes. Dead to us, surely," she returned, with dry lips.

"How could Nevada be dead to us if he were alive?" queried Ben sharply. Then he lifted his head to some interruption of his thought. "I hear a horse —comin' lickety-cut! Hello! it's Dillon! Damn the luck! There's somethin' up!"

Hettie sustained a sharp quickening of her pulse. A horse and rider bobbed up over the bench. At the moment Ina came out of the house. Ben strode off the porch to meet Dillon, who rode up like a whirlwind; and he leaped out of the saddle with the lithe grace of one to whom such action was habit.

"Mornin', Boss," he said, and tipped his sombrero to Hettie and Ina. "You're late. So I rode up."

"Bad news?" asked Ben.

"No, it ain't bad, but it's disturbin'. Cowboy just in from Tom Day's range.

Name's Laskin. He rode a hoss to death gettin' here. I gave him another hoss, an' he rode off for Franklidge's ranch."

"Yes. Well, what was he ridin' so hard for?" queried Ben, as if prepared.

"Yesterday he was in camp near Silver Meadows," went on Dillon. "Another rider with him—whose name I didn't get. Some men rode down on them. Laskin said they wasn't drunk. Just keyed up over a big deal. They made no bones about the deal—at least their leader didn't. An' he was no other than Jim Lacy."

"Jim Lacy bobbed up again!" ejaculated Ben with irritation. "Go on, Dillon."

"Lacy said he was goin' to rustle the stock at Silver Meadows an' sent you his compliments."

"Well, I'm a —— ——!"

"Pretty nervy, wasn't it?" asked Dillon. He appeared excited, which was a striking exception to his usual genial and imperturbable mood.

"Nervy? Yes, if it's true," retorted Ben. "But I don't believe it. Jim Lacy or anybody else would be a fool to tell such a plan, before pullin' it off."

"Reckon that seems so," replied the foreman smoothly. "But sometimes these desperadoes like Lacy do queer things. It's not braggin'. Such men don't brag. It's just sort of a cool defiance of law—an' honest ranchin'. Well, Lacy has twenty-four hours' start. There was a big bunch of cattle at Silver, so Laskin said. The last of your stock, an' some of Day's an' Franklidge's. We were figgerin' on a big roundup *pronto*. But we're too late, Boss."

"Too late! Why, man, if it *is* true, we can stop that drive before it gets down to the road," declared Ben.

"Stop nothin'. Lacy's outfit won't drive this way. They'll drive up over the Rim, an' I'll gamble there's a bunch of five thousand head on the way now."

Ben sat down heavily as if suddenly weighted.

"Boss, I'm sure kickin' myself for not figgerin' that very deal," went on Dillon. "You see, the cattle were workin' high up. An' grass an' water's so good at Silver that they bunched thick. Laskin swears it's only a half day's drive up the canyon which opens into Silver. An' there you are."

"If it's true I'll—I'll run down this Jim Lacy an' jail him. I don't care what it costs," declared Ben. "But I reckon we're gettin' all r'iled up over cowboy guessin'."

"Give me a couple of days off, Boss?" asked Dillon in strange eagerness. "I'll find out."

"No. Some of the rustlers will plug you, an' then I *would* be out of luck," replied Ben decisively.

"But I want to go," declared Dillon, with the blood rising under the tan of his handsome face.

"I appreciate the risk you'd take for me, Dillon. But, no. I'm givin' you orders to take Raidy with six cowboys an' go to Silver Meadows. Hurry back to report. Then we'll see."

Dillon had difficulty in repressing some kind of agitation. What an intent, almost derisive glance he gave

Ben! Then without another word he mounted and rode furiously down toward the corrals.

"Girls, did you hear all he had to say?" asked Ben, appealing for sympathy.

"We couldn't very well help it," replied Ina, putting a hand on Ben's shoulder. "Dear, I—I haven't confidence in this man Dillon."

"Huh! Nor in me, either," retorted Ben, shaking her hand off.

That action hurt Ina's sensitive feelings and she drew away haughtily.

"Very well, Ben Ide," she declared. "But when the crash comes, don't you look to *me* for sympathy."

With that she went back into the house. Ben gazed helplessly up at his sister.

"There! Can you beat that? My own wife gone against me!"

Then Marvie appeared again, this time black in the face.

"Ben Ide, I've a bone to pick with you," he burst out.

"Pick away, you young rooster," returned Ben wearily.

"Did Dillon tell you a cowboy named Laskin rode in with news about a cattle drive?"

"Sure he did."

"Ha! That's what he told Raidy. He's a damn liar!"

"Marvie, take care! You're no longer a kid. Would you say that to Dillon's face?"

"Would I? Huh! I *did*, an' I cussed him good."

"Why did you? Marvie, I'm losin' patience."

"An' I'm losin' patience with you, Ben Ide. Listen. I saw that cowboy. He wasn't no rider named Laskin. He was Cedar Hatt!"

"What? Marvie, you're not only loco, but you're ravin' sore at Dillon. You'll go too far. Take care."

"Care, hell!" shouted Marvie. "It's you who's loco."

"Marvie Blaine, you're fired," replied Ben curtly. "You can't ride for me any more."

Marvie underwent a sudden disastrous change of mood. "Fired?" he said poignantly.

"Yes, fired. Now get out of my house an' go over to Hettie's till I can decide what to do with you."

"Aw—Ben!" gasped Marvie.

"Don't 'aw—Ben' me," said Ben furiously. "Get out of here now—you round-eyed, freckle-faced four-flush of a cowboy!"

Marvie started as if he had been lashed.

"Ben Ide, you'll be sorry for that," he declared, and tramped away.

Hettie felt something of a sneak herself as she stole away, back to her own cabin and the seclusion of her room. Was she not betraying Ben by withholding facts she alone knew? Yet how impossible to crush him utterly! Jim Lacy was Nevada! She would never have the courage to tell him.

As for herself, the last hope had fled, the last doubt, the last shred of stubborn faith. Nevada was a rustler. He had fallen so low that he could steal from the friend who had once succored him. The thing was so base that Hettie writhed under the shame of her seemingly indestructible love for this impostor Nevada—this fugitive horseman who had won her under another guise—this Jim Lacy, killer and thief. But though everything else seemed dead, hope, faith, interest in life, will to go on fighting, she knew her love survived. It was the very pulse of her heart.

Two days went by, with the Ide households under considerable strain of uncertainty. Raidy and Dillon, with their riders, returned about noon of the third day.

Ben was somber, nervous, silent, and he paced the living-room, oblivious to the importunities of little Blaine, who toddled here and there, as if he were playing a game.

Presently Raidy entered the open door, sombrero in hand, dusty and unshaven.

"Howdy, Boss!" he said in greeting, and bowed quaintly to Hettie and Ina.

"Took you long enough. Where's Dillon?" replied Ben gruffly.

"Wal, you know Dillon always leaves the bad reports for me to make."

"Did he return with you?"

"Not exactly. He left us at daybreak this mornin' an' beat us in. I told him he'd better come along with me. But he said he'd see you later. Boss, Dillon is in purty bad humor. I never seen him like this."

"Drinkin'?" queried Ben sharply.

"No. He's just black as thunder an' sore as a kicked pup."

"That'd be natural for anyone who had my interests at heart, as Dillon has. But it's odd he didn't come to report. Well, out with your bad news."

"I'm sorry, Ben. It couldn't be no wuss."

"Oh, Ben!" cried Ina.

Raidy appeared to have lost his usual taciturnity. "Boss, you're rustled off the range. The last of your stock, except some stragglin' steers an' yearlin's, is gone—along with a thousand head of Tom Day's."

Ben Ide made a flashing violent gesture, as if to strike. He paled. His eyes shot fire.

"They've cleaned me?" he demanded.

"Yes, Boss. I made sure, because I wasn't trustin' Dillon to give a full report."

Hettie felt both hot and cold; and she stared at her brother fearfully, expecting him to break into an ungovernable rage. She had reckoned without her brother, however, for although Ben turned white to the lips he suddenly became calm and cool. With uncertainty gone he changed radically.

"Ahuh. So your hunch has come true," he said, almost with sarcasm. "Wal, I reckon you'll get a lot of satisfaction crowin' over me an' Dillon."

"No, Boss, I won't even say I told you so," returned Raidy.

"Give me the facts, short an' sweet," said Ben.

"Wal, Tom Day an' his riders were at Silver Meadows when we arrived. A sheepherder had tipped them off to the drive. We split up an' rode all around the Meadows. Only a few cattle left. Them rustlers made a slick job of it. Day an' Franklidge lost over a thousand head, an' you lost all you had left. A matter of three thousand head. We took the trail up the canyon. An', say, it was a bowlavarde clear to the Rim. I was for trailin' the rustlers to a finish fight, but Day wouldn't let any of us go down in that hole. We'd have been ambushed an' some of us killed. Besides, he said we could never have recovered the cattle. Once turned loose in that jungle of scrub oak, manzanita, an' cactus, them cattle would have vamoosed like ticks shook off a leaf. So we turned back."

"You told Tom Day, of course, that Jim Lacy made this drive?" queried Ben.

"Tom knowed all about it. Seems thet Lacy sent Tom word he was goin' to make this big steal. Sent his respects

to Tom an' Judge Franklidge an' said he'd drop in to Winthrop some day."

"By Heaven! this Lacy is a cool one!" exclaimed Ben, as if admiration was wrenched from him.

"Cool? Wal, Boss, you might call Lacy thet, but I reckon he's a mixture of hell's fire an' chain lightnin'!"

"I'll hang him," said Ben with deadly calm.

"No, Ben, if you'll excuse me, I'll say you'll never put a rope round Jim Lacy's neck. He couldn't never be jailed, either. He'll die in his boots, with a gun spoutin', an' Gawd help the men frontin' him!"

"Bah! You talk like Marvie Blaine," retorted Ben curtly. "An' you, Raidy—a growin' man!"

"Boss, it grieves me thet I've lived to disagree with you," returned Raidy with dignity.

"This Jim Lacy is the leader of the Pine Tree outfit!" asserted Ben.

"Wal, me an' Tom Day reckoned so. An' for once Dillon agreed with us. Tom said Lacy jest got tired of layin' low an' bein' mysterious. So he comes out in the open. I'll bet you he'll ride right into Winthrop."

"Raidy, I'm glad Lacy cleaned me out. I'm through waitin' around to see what's goin' to happen next. I've sent for Sheriff Macklin an' a posse. This mornin' I got word from Struthers, the Phoenix sheriff who's made it so hot for rustlers in southern Arizona. Struthers is in Winthrop at my request. They'll arrive here not later than tomorrow. I'll have Dillon get twenty-five of the hardest men he can gather. I'll offer ten thousand dollars reward for Jim Lacy, dead or alive. I'll spend every dollar I have to run down Lacy an' his Pine Tree gang."

"Wal, Boss, you're talkin' high, wide, an' handsome," replied Raidy. "But it's not for me to offer opinions. This ranch—an' for that matter, this whole range—ain't big enough for me an' your man Dillon. I jest have to quit."

"Very well, Raidy. I'm sorry you see it that way," returned Ben coldly, and with a wave of his hand terminated the interview.

Hettie fled. As she ran out she heard Ina deliver a stinging rebuke to her husband. Then a door slammed. Hettie hurried home in a state of mind bordering on a breakdown.

"What's all the row over at Ben's?" her mother inquired placidly.

"Rustlers, cattle, foremen, sheriffs, and Heaven only knows what," replied Hettie distractedly. "Ben fired Raidy."

"No! Why, that's dreadful! Raidy taught Ben how to ride a horse. Oh, this dreadful Arizona! But I don't mean that, Hettie. I love this quiet, sweet wild country. The men, though—they're—they're loco, as Marvie says. And Ben has got it, too."

"Mother, have you seen Marvie today?" asked Hettie.

"Marvie went away yesterday and hasn't come back. At least he didn't sleep in his bed."

"Oh dear! That wild boy! Here's more to—to worry over."

Hettie went to her room, with the motive of indulging her grief. But sight of her riding-boots acted powerfully upon her and she decided to take a ride. Perhaps a long hard gallop would be good for her; and moreover, she might meet Marvie on the trail. Soon she was riding fast with the wind in her face.

But neither a gallop nor a run sufficed to change Hettie's mood. She rode into the woods, and let her horse walk at will down the shady trail in the

direction from which Marvie always returned.

And here, alone, under the impelling influence of the forest, Hettie realized that she was a most miserable and heartbroken girl, with a terrible sword hanging over her head. How hopeless her situation! What use to think? There was not a thought nor an action that could help her in her extremity. Courage and intelligence had gone with the loss of hope.

Arizona had killed her dream, as it had ruined her brother. And the horror of Hettie's state seemed that the climax of this infernal paradox had yet to come.

Suddenly she caught the rhythmic beat of swift hoofs ahead round a green curve of the trail. That must be Marvie's horse. A rush of relief swept over her. The pine boughs spread. A big black horse was upon her before she could pull a rein. She cried out. But the rider hauled the black to his haunches, and that rider was Nevada.

Chapter Seventeen

Sunset for Two

CLUTCHING the pommel of her saddle, Hettie sustained an awful stunning shock. For an instant, all her faculties, and every sensibility except the physical animal instinct of holding her equilibrium, were suspended. Then emotion burst the dam.

When Nevada's horse plunged up, his head came abreast Hettie's horse.

"*You!*" Hettie felt the word leave her stiff lips, but she heard it only as a whisper.

Nevada swept off his sombrero and bowed low to the mane of his horse.

"Wal, shore it's Hettie Ide," he drawled in the cool, leisurely accent that cut into her heart like blades.

Then they gazed at one another, as if sight was trying to reconcile the face of dreams with the reality. The face Hettie looked into had the same lean outline, the dark blue-black shade of beard against the clear brown tan, the intent light hazel-flicked eyes, like level piercing points. But it did not have the soul with which her imagination and memory had invested it.

"I—saw you—in Winthrop," began Hettie, as if to find relief from oppression.

"Shore. I reckoned you might," he replied. As he spoke he rolled a cigarette with steady fingers. "Too bad you had to run into me head!"

"Too bad! It's terrible. But I'm glad," exclaimed Hettie, quivering, shaking all over.

"Thank you, an' I'm shore sorry I cain't return the compliment," he said, and bent his head to light the cigarette.

His cool nonchalance, that she remembered so poignantly, seemed now to inflame her.

"*Jim Lacy!*" she cried in scornful, sad haste to acquaint him with her knowledge of his infamy.

He blew a thin column of smoke upward, his penetrating, inscrutable eyes studying her face.

"Why didn't you trust me? Oh, why?" she went on, slipping farther toward an emotional outbreak.

"Hettie, there was a time, long ago, when I'd rather have been daid than let you know I was Jim Lacy."

"You were ashamed?"

"I shore was."

"Long ago, you said—then you're *not* ashamed now?"

"Well, it cain't matter now."

"Why can't it matter now?" she queried.

He made an expressive gesture, and then gazed down through the open forest to the colorful desert.

"Ben doesn't dream, his—his old friend Nevada is you—the notorious Jim Lacy. Must he—find out?"

Nevada dropped his head. His horse, nosing Hettie's, brought Nevada closer to her, so that she might have touched him. This proximity bore upon her with incalculable influence. She pulled her horse aside, to no avail, for the big black followed with eager whinny.

"How can you be so cool—so hatefully cool?" burst out Hettie. "Ben loved you. I—I—What did he care who you were? Why didn't you always stay Nevada? Ben left no stone unturned to locate you. Failing that, he came to Arizona because he hoped you might turn up. You have turned up. But as Jim Lacy—as a rustler who stole from him! Stole from a friend you once saved and succored and loved! Did you not know those cattle were Ben's?"

"Shore—I did," replied Nevada.

"Oh, it was a terrible thing to do!" cried Hettie, covering her face with her hands. "Your pard? It will cut him to the quick—embitter him forever—and it'll kill *me!*"

His silence, his imperturbability roused her to a sudden furious passion that burned away her tears and waved her face scarlet.

"Wal, you're a mighty healthy lady after so many years of dyin'," he drawled. "Hettie, you always was pretty, but you've grown into a plumb handsome woman. Reckon the cowboys are sweeter'n ever on you."

"That must have meant a lot to you," she flashed, breathing hard.

"Dillon, now. *He* was."

"Yes. He has made love to me. Begged me to marry him," returned Hettie in fiery flippancy, hoping to make him jealous.

"Wal, you don't say. He's shore a handsome *hombre*. Devil with the women, I heah. Why don't you marry him?"

"I—may yet," replied Hettie somberly. He baffled her. In his cool, inscrutable presence she felt like a child.

"Hettie, if you do you'll be changin' your mind considerable from what it was that night at the dance in Winthrop."

"What do you know about that?"

"Wal, I happened to heah you tell Dillon a few things, an' I seen him try to get you in his arms."

"*You!* You were there?"

"Shore. An' after you flounced off I introduced myself to Dillon an' most polite invited him to draw. But he didn't have the nerve, so I took a punch at his handsome face."

"You struck Dillon on my behalf!" murmured Hettie, softening.

"Wal, yes, partly. But I had it in for him before. By the way, is he at the ranch?"

"Yes."

"Good! I'm shore a lucky *hombre*—since I took up with Jim Lacy again."

"You were going to our ranch?"

"I *am* goin', Miss Hettie Ide."

"What—for?"

"Wal, reckon my prime reason is to shoot out one of Dillon's handsome eyes. But I've another—"

"Oh! You have something against Dillon? You'll—*you'll kill* him?"

"Reckon if you hadn't held me up heah he'd be daid now. An' that stands for me, too."

"Ah! Then Dillon is—a—a dangerous man—as you—"

"Hettie, he's a bad *hombre*. Name is Ed Richardson, once with Billy the Kid's outfit. I'll kill him, shore, but he might return the compliment."

"You—you bloody gunman!"

"Hettie, if he does kill me you can tell Ben the truth, then come an' smooth back my hair an' wipe my bloody face. Ha! Ha!" he said, in bitter mockery.

"Hush!" Hettie reined her horse closer, so that her stirrup locked with Nevada's. "Do not do this terrible deed. Be big enough to abandon your feud. Give up this outlaw, rustler, gunman life. Take me away with you to some far country. You can start anew."

"For Gawd's sake, Hettie Ide, are you crazy?" he returned stridently.

"Not yet. But I will be soon—if this —goes on," she panted, and slipped her gloved hand to his shoulder. "Nevada, I—I still love you. I've always loved you. I forgive all. I surrender all. I don't care who you are—what you've been. All I ask is that you save Ben the horror so near—that you take me away and give up this life—Say you will."

"No," he said hoarsely.

"Nevada! Don't you love me—still?" And she leaned to him, overcome, betraying all her woman's soul of love, and hope for him, for Ben, for herself.

"Love you? Ha! Ha!"

"Don't laugh. This means life or death to me. Say you love me. Say you'll take me."

"Yes, I love you, mad woman. But I cain't accept your sacrifice. I cain't ruin you. Good Gawd! Hettie, you forget I'm Jim Lacy!"

"It's because you *are* Jim Lacy."

"Heavens! This heah is awful! Hettie, I cain't—I won't."

"You lie, then. You do not love me. *I* am proving mine. But you—you are false. You have taken some—other woman. You don't love me!"

Hettie, dim of eye, saw him loom over her. She felt herself seized in iron arms and dragged from her horse. Then she was lifted over the pommel and crushed to his breast, and bent backward, blind and breathless, a victim of terrible devouring lips.

Hettie's senses reeled and almost failed her. When his violence ceased she felt herself held closely for a long moment, then let down from the horse until her feet touched the ground. She was falling when he leaped from the saddle. He set her on the grass with her back against a tree, and there her eyes opened.

Nevada knelt before her. Slowly a wild darkness faded from his eyes.

"There. You've come to. I reckon I must ask you to excuse me for bein' rough. But I shore couldn't stand that talk aboot not lovin' you."

"I will not believe—unless you prove it," returned Hettie unsteadily.

Nevada rose to his feet. "I cain't prove it your way," he replied.

"Oh, what have you done to me?" cried Hettie, wildly, as again passion rose strong.

"Reckon nothin' compared to what you've done to me," he responded, with somber gaze upon her. "Dillon will just aboot beat me to a gun."

Hettie stood up, holding to the tree trunk. "Nothing! I've loved you since I first met you. I've been true. I trusted you. I cared not for your past. I believed in your future. I prayed for you. My faith in you was as great as my faith in God. I believed you loved me.

That when you rode away from Forlorn River—to escape the consequences—when you killed Less Setter to save Ben—I believed you would be true to me, to the higher self you found through Ben's love and mine. But you were too little. You went back to the old life—to the old comrades. Rustlers, gamblers, gunmen! You killed just because you wanted to keep that name hated and feared. You are a bloody monster. No doubt you sank to the embrace of vile women—the consorts of thieves! O my God! it would be my death if I could not kill my love. But I will. It will lie dead as my faith. You are a liar, a failure, a weakling. Basest of all is your ingratitude. You stole from my brother—who loved you."

Nevada's eyes held a blaze like black lightning.

"Reckon that'll be aboot all I want to heah," he said, in tones she had never heard before.

"That is—all."

He gathered up the reins and vaulted into the saddle, then turned.

"It's aboot sunset," he said, with strange gaze upon the west. "Sunset for Dillon! An' shore sunset for me!"

Then he spurred the big black, and clattering into the trail soon vanished from sight toward the ranch.

Chapter Eighteen

The Challenge

NEVADA approached the Ide ranch from that side closest to the forest, where the pines and the cedars trooped down the gentle slopes of the benches, clear to the most outward of the cattle sheds.

With his brain on fire and his heart like lead, his whole being crushed under the burning weight of Hettie's outspoken love and terrible scorn, he halted under cover of the last clump of cedars, and dismounted. He removed saddle and bridle from his horse and turned it free. He would have no more need of a horse.

He glided behind brush to the sage and through this to the pole fence. It led to the back of log cabins, which he marked as the bunkhouses. The sunset hour was near. Cowboys, riders, range hands, foreman, all would be waiting the call to supper. The day had been hot. Just now, with the first cool breeze breathing down from the hills, all the men would be outdoors.

Nevada stole swiftly along the fence to the first high corral. Climbing to the top of the high fence, he peeped over. No man in sight! He climbed and ran and climbed and ran, quickly gaining the open gate of the last corral. The two small log cabins and the long one stood across the open space, with barns to the left and courtyard on the right, leading up to the Ide homes in the edge of the forest.

Nevada did not hesitate a moment. Leisurely he strode toward the long cabin, making for the nearest end, where cords of firewood were stacked high. That end, where blue smoke curled from a stone chimeny, would be the kitchen. There would be a porch on the other side.

Nevada gained the woodpiles. They furnished him perfect passageway and perfect cover. It never crossed his mind that Dillon might not be there. Dillon would be there. It was something that he felt.

He glided between the high stacks of wood. Then he put his eye to an aper-

ture between two billets of cedar that protruded from the stack.

A dozen or more men lounged and sat and stood in plain sight. Cowboys sat on the ground, backs to the cabin. Nevada recognized Macklin, the Winthrop sheriff, leaning against the hitching-rail, in conversation with two other men. Facing Nevada was a tall man in black and he had a bright badge on his vest. He was another sheriff, a stranger to Nevada.

"We sure want to get off by sunup," he was saying to a man near him.

This man stood with his back toward Nevada. His powerful supple shoulders showed wonderfully through his clean white shirt. Nevada recognized that lithe stalwart build, the leonine neck, the handsome head, with its clustering fair hair. Dillon!

A slight cold thrill ran over Nevada. He drew back behind the woodpile, loosened his gun in its sheath, and stood there an instant while the waiting forces of brain and muscle vibrated into a tremendous unity.

"Come an' get it," sang out the cook.

"Whoopee! Whoaboy," shouted the cowboys, scrambling up.

At this instant Nevada bounded out swiftly and ran to a halt.

"*Hold on!*" he yelled, with all the power of his lungs. His piercing voice made statues of all.

In the instant of silence that ensued Dillon was the only man to move and he wheeled swift as a flash, so swiftly that the receding trace of mirth had not yet left his handsome face.

"Howdy, Dillon!" drawled Nevada.

Macklin shuffled erect in great alarm.

"That's Jim Lacy!" he shouted.

"Shore is. Careful now, you outsiders!" warned Nevada, yet with eyes only for Dillon.

Every man in line with Dillon plunged off the porch or darted into the cabin.

Dillon stood on the porch, facing Nevada, scarcely thirty feet distant. His reaction from careless mirth to recognition of peril was as swift as his sight. But there followed the instant when his faculties had to grasp what that peril was and how he should meet it.

Nevada had gambled on this instant. It was his advantage. He did not underrate Dillon. He read his mind in those dilating eyes.

"Wal, you know me," cut out Nevada icily. "An' I know you—Dillon—*Campbell!*—ED RICHARDSON!"

That was the paralyzing challenge. The rustler turned a ghastly white. His green eyes set balefully. He knew. He showed his training. He had no more fear of death than of the swallows flitting under the eaves above. But he had a magnificent and desperate courage to take his enemy with him.

Richardson never uttered a word. Almost imperceptibly his body lowered as if under instinct to crouch. His stiff bent right arm began to quiver.

Nevada saw the thought in Richardson's eyes. When his hand flashed down Nevada was drawing.

Crash! Nevada's shot did not beat Richardson's draw, but it broke his aim. *Boom!* The rustler's gun went off half leveled. He lurched with terrible violence and his gun boomed again. The bullet scattered the gravel at Nevada's feet and spanged away.

A wide red spot appeared as if by magic on the middle of Richardson's white shirt. How terrible to see him strain to raise his gun arm!

At Nevada's second shot one of Richardson's awful eyes went blank. His gun clattered to the floor. He swayed. His arm hooked round the porch post. Then it sank limp, letting him fall with sodden thud.

Nevada flipped his gun into the air and caught it by the barrel.

"Heah, sir," he said to the sheriff with the star on his vest, and extended the gun butt foremost. "I reckon that'll be aboot all for Jim Lacy."

The strain on the watchers relaxed. A murmur of wonder ran through them, growing louder. The sheriff came to a power of movement and speech.

"What? Lacy, are you handin'—over your gun?" he queried hoarsely.

"Wal, I'm not pointin' the right end of it at you," replied Nevada, and tossed the gun at the sheriff's feet.

"What—the—hell?" gasped Raidy, staring hard at Nevada.

Here Macklin came rushing up, to get between Nevada and the other sheriff.

"Jim Lacy, you're my prisoner," yelled Macklin, beside himself with the strange opportunity presented and a terror of the enormity of his risk. He drew his gun. "Hands up."

"Shoot an' be damned, you four-flush officer of the law," retorted Nevada wearily, and turning his back to Macklin he strode to a seat on the porch steps.

"Hyar comes Tom Day with his outfit," yelled a cowboy excitedly, pointing to the horsemen entering the square. "The whole range's hyar. Haw! Haw!"

Nevada experienced a weariness of soul and body. It was over. He did not care what happened.

"Say, give me a smoke—one of you punchers," he said, removing his sombrero to wipe his clammy brow.

Chapter Nineteen

"Who Is This Man?"

MARVIE BLAINE came swinging down the trail at a gallop, with Rose Hatt riding close behind.

"Hey there, Hettie!" shouted Marvie, when still some rods distant. "Look who's comin' behind."

Hettie complied. Marvie rode right upon her before halting.

Rose joined them, to crowd her pony close, eager yet shy. "Oh, Miss Hettie!" she cried rapturously. "Marvie's brought me to you. I—I'll never go back—to the brakes."

"My dear, you're welcome to my home," returned Hettie warmly, leaning to kiss the flushed face.

"Hettie, you've seen a ghost—the same ghost I seen," declared Marvie shrewdly.

"Oh, Marvie lad—a ghost indeed!" moaned Hettie. "Nevada! He just left me—to—to kill Dillon!"

"No news to me," shouted Marvie fiercely. "I've got to see that! Fetch Rose. But go round. Keep away from the corrals."

The last he delivered over his shoulder as he urged his horse into the trail and beat him into a run.

"Come, Rose—ride," suddenly cried Hettie, with a start, striking her horse.

The spirited animal, unused to that, broke into a gallop, and then a run. Hettie looked back. The girl was close behind, her hair flying in the wind.

Where the trail emerged from the pines, to drop down on the sage and cedar slope adjacent to the ranch land,

Hettie turned her horse and kept to the top of the slope. Suddenly she imagined she heard a shot. Another! A gunshot—then two sharp cracks, clear on the breeze. She reeled in her saddle. Almost she put her horse at the ranch fence. But she kept on in wild flight, forgetting Rose, clutching with left hand at her breast, where uncertainty augmented to supreme agony.

Her fast horse swept on as in a race, on by the corrals and gardens, up over the low bench, and through the woods to her cabin. Hettie rode on, over the swaying bridge, into the shady green glade before Ben's house.

Here she pulled her iron-jawed horse to a snorting halt. She saw men running. She heard Rose's pony come clattering over the bridge. Then Marvie's horse appeared over the rise of ground toward the corral.

One sight of Marvie's flashing face answered Hettie. She could have screamed in her frenzy. Marvie reached her at the moment Rose came up.

"Nevada's down there—handcuffed!" he whispered, pantingly. "Dillon's dead! Oh, there'll be—hell now! But not a word from—you an' Rose!"

The boy's heated face, the horses, Rose so white and rapt, the running riders, the houses and the pines—all blurred in Hettie's sight. She had to fight fiercely to recover. She felt the girl's strong hand on her, steadying her in the saddle. The deadly faintness passed.

Ben and Judge Franklidge were striding out to meet the running cowboys.

"Judge, I told you I heard shots," Ben was saying. "Somethin's happened!"

"Seems like. But don't let it upset you," replied the judge.

"There's Marvie—has he gone loco?" exclaimed Ben in amazement, as the boy, riding wildly, scattered the men coming up the slope.

"By thunder! Ben," replied Franklidge suddenly espying Hettie and Rose.

At that juncture the first cowboys reached Ben to blurt out: "Boss, Jim Lacy's here! He just killed Dillon."

"Wha—at?" shouted Ben incredulously.

As the cowboy repeated his news Raidy arrived at the head of three more of Ben's hands. The old foreman drew himself up steadily, though with heaving breast.

"Boss—Dillon's been killed—Jim Lacy!"

Ben Ide leaped up in sudden ungovernable fury. His face turned dusk red. He clenched his fists high above his head.

"Murder!" gasped Ben.

"Not much! It was an even break. Lacy dropped out of the clouds, seems like. Dillon was game, sir, an' quick—but not quick enough."

"Killed! My best man," rasped out Ben stridently. "Where is this Jim Lacy?"

"He's sittin' on the cookhouse porch," replied Raidy. "Handcuffed, sir. The sheriff's put him in irons."

Ben cracked a hard fist into his palm. "They got him, then!"

"An', Boss," interrupted Raidy, "Tom Day has rid in with his outfit. They wanted to lynch Lacy. But Tom roared at them like a mad bull. Reckon you'd better hurry down."

Ina came running from the house. "Ben, what—in the—world's happened?" she asked in alarm.

"Ina, Dillon has been shot by that bloody devil, Jim Lacy."

"Oh, how dreadful!" Then Ina caught sight of Hettie and Rose. She ran to them. "Hettie, isn't it awful? That Dillon! I wonder—You look sort of wild, Hettie. Who's this girl with you?"

"Rose Hatt. Marvie's friend," replied Hettie, bending down. "Oh, Ina, I've—"

Ben, striding away with his men, turned to call out, "Ina, stay back, an' keep those girls with you!"

"But why can't I come, too?" burst out Ina.

"No place for women," he returned curtly. "There's one dead man now an' soon there'll be another."

Ina halted. "Hettie, we mustn't go."

"Listen, old girl. Chucks for Ben Ide! There's not enough men in Arizona to keep me away," declared Hettie wildly. Then she bent down over Ina to whisper: "Jim Lacy is Nevada!"

Ina put a hand over her mouth to stifle a scream. Then she gasped, "No!"

"Yes! I've know it for long. And I *met* him today. O God! But I—I can't talk now. Come."

Hettie, with Rose on her left, rode at the heels of the striding men. Ina ran beside Hettie, clinging to the stirrup.

They traversed the short lane to enter the wide square, on the other side of which stood the quarters of the ranch hands. There were ten or more saddle horses standing bridles down. Hettie's startled sight included a dark group of men massed in front of the cookhouse. There! Nevada must be there—soon to be confronted by Ben.

"Open up here," shouted Ben, in loud hard voice. "Spread out—let me see this man."

The crowd split in a hurry, leaving a wide V-shaped space, at the apex of which sat the prisoner on the edge of the porch. The dead man lay on the ground, covered with a blanket.

Hettie recognized Nevada, though his head was bowed and his sombrero hid his face. His hands, in irons, hung over his knees. What a strange, pathetic figure! Hettie's sore heart failed her.

Macklin, the Winthrop sheriff, beaming and bristling with his importance, advanced.

"Wal, Mr. Ide, here's your man."

Ben advanced, his gaze passing from the dead man on the ground to the slumping prisoner.

"Jim Lacy," he called sternly.

There was no movement from Nevada, except that he seemed to contract. Nobody else stirred.

"Lacy, I'm goin' to hang you!" rang out Ben Ide.

Still no response from this notorious gunman, whose daring, whose cold nerve, had long been a subject for campfire gossip.

"Stand up. Let me look at you," ordered Ben suddenly.

With a violent wrench the prisoner jerked out of his dejected posture, to slip off the porch and stand erect. He ducked his head, removing the sombrero, which fell to the ground. Composed and pale then he faced his judge.

Ben Ide seemed struck by lightning.

"My God! Who—is this—man?" he faltered, almost inaudibly.

There was no answer.

"*Who are you?*"

"Wal, Ben, I'm shore sorry we met this heah way," came the reply, in the old slow cool accents. "But I reckon it had to be."

"*Nevada!*" With the hoarse wondering cry, Ben leaped forward to clasp his old friend in a close embrace and hold him so a long moment.

Hettie saw Ben's face in convulsion, his eyes shut tight, his expression one

to bewilder the staring bystanders. To her it was beautiful and somehow soul-satisfying. Her eyes were dim, her heart pounding.

"My old pard! Found at last! Thank God!—I feared you were dead. All these long years! But I hoped an' prayed. An' here you are! Say somethin' to me—you old wild-horse-huntin' pard! Nevada!"

"Yes, Ben—Nevada to you—but to all the world—only Jim Lacy," replied Nevada sadly.

"*What?*" cried Ben, with a violent start. Then his nervous quick hands ran down to Nevada's irons. "God Almighty! You Jim Lacy?"

"Yes, to my shame—pard."

Ben's transition to reality was swift and passionate. Suddenly white, with blazing eyes, he tore at Nevada's handcuffs.

"I don't care a damn who you were! You're Nevada to me—my friend—my pard. An' so you'll be forever."

"Wal, Ben—it's shore good to heah you," replied Nevada, his voice trailing off.

"Macklin, unlock these irons," ordered Ben.

"What? But, Mr. Ide—he's my prisoner!" protested the sheriff, aghast. "He's wanted for rustlin'. He killed your foreman. The law—"

"To hell with your law!" interrupted Ben fiercely. "Unlock his irons! Quick. Before I throw my gun on you!"

His hand went to his hip. The crowd stirred with restless feet and whispered exclamation. Tom Day stepped out to get between Macklin and Ben.

"Easy now, Ben. Let old Tom have a word," he said in his big voice. "We've had enough gunplay for one day. Macklin, give me the key to these irons."

The sheriff, red of face, flustered and intimidated, complied with poor grace. Day unlocked the irons, removed them, and somewhat with contempt cast them at Macklin's feet.

Nevada rubbed his wrists and then looked up to smile at Day.

"Put her thar, Texas Jack," boomed the old rancher. "We're shore from the old Lone Star State. Let me be the first to shake the good right hand thet did for Dillon."

"Wal, Tom, shore you needn't rub it in," drawled Nevada, as he yielded to the vigorous onslaught of the older man.

"Come heah, Franklidge," called Day, beckoning to the judge. "I reckon it's aboot time."

Ben Ide stood motionless, his eyes expressive of an incredulous wonder that he could not voice. As for Hettie, she seemed to feel her blood and brain whirl madly. Texas Jack! That warm, splendid smile of the old rancher! Judge Franklidge moving forward with dignified step and grave, kindly face!

But the other black-garbed sheriff intercepted him.

"Mr. Ide, the law must take its course. Even if this Jim Lacy was an old pard of yours, he's now a criminal. He's a cattle an' hoss thief. We set out to hang the leader of this Pine Tree rustler outfit. Sure Lacy is him. His killin' of Dillon proves that. If this is no hangin' case, it sure is one for jail."

"Struthers, I hired you to come up here," returned Ben deliberately. "I admit I wanted Jim Lacy shot or hanged. But I've changed my mind. He's my friend. I owe my life, my fortune, my family, all to him. There's some mystery—some mistake here. That's for me to learn, an' not for you."

"All right. But I'll take Lacy to Phoenix for trial," replied Struthers.

"If you do, it'll be over my dead body."

The situation looked grave again. But Judge Franklidge interposed to push Struthers back.

"You have no jurisdiction here unless I give it," he said. Then he turned to Ben with courtly kindness. "My son, don't distress yourself further. Just have a little patience."

"Patience!" ejaculated Ben.

Judge Franklidge advanced to place his left hand on Nevada's shoulder and extend his right, which Nevada quickly met.

"Jack, you may be from Texas, but you sure belong to Arizona," he said heartily.

"Wal, I should smile," corroborated Day heartily.

Judge Franklidge turned to indicate in slight gesture the dead man on the ground.

"Dillon, of course, was the leader of this Pine Tree rustler gang," he asserted. "Otherwise you would not have risked revealing yourself here?"

"Wal, reckon I wouldn't," replied Nevada.

"Dillon!" boomed Tom Day. "Who was he, Jack?"

"Ed Richardson, late of New Mexico."

"Richardson? Lincoln County war *hombre?* Billy the Kid outfit?"

"That's the man, Tom."

"Wal, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" ejaculated the old rancher. "I begin to see light. Dillon was thick with Stewart. An' Stewart never worked the same for me after Dillon became foreman heah at Ben's. This mawnin' he was gone. An' he knowed where we was bound for. Jack, what you make of thet?"

"Stewart was one of the three Arizonians that Richardson took into his New Mexican outfit."

"Ahuh! Who's the other two?"

"Burt Stillwell an' Cedar Hatt."

"Stillwell! Jack, didn't you—meet thet *hombre* just lately?" queried Day, his eyes glinting.

"Yes. It was Stillwell who stole Ben's horse, California Red. I made him send Red back. Reckon that r'iled Stillwell. An' Marvie Blaine shot Cedar Hatt today. So the Pine Tree outfit is shore broke."

"Marvie Blaine shot Cedar Hatt?" ejaculated Judge Franklidge.

"Spill it, Jack. Tell us aboot Marvie. Heaven help us now!" went on Day.

"I happened on Cedar Hatt today," replied Nevada. "He was ridin' down in one of the brakes an' I was on top. Wal, I soon saw he was trailin' someone. So I worked ahaid an' got down off the Rim. There I happened to run on Marvie an' his girl, Rose Hatt. They were spoonin' under the trees an' never saw me. I was lookin' for Cedar an' I knew Cedar was lookin' for them. So I kept quiet. Pretty soon Cedar slips up, right on to them. An' he begins to rave. Rose talked back an' shore Marvie showed spunk. Cedar knocked him down, an' then Rose, too. That r'iled Marvie an' he tore into Cedar. It looked bad, with Cedar pullin' at his gun. He got it out, but Marvie fought him for it. An', wal, in the fight Cedar dropped the gun an' Marvie quick as a cat snatched it up. Usin' both hands, he throwed it on Cedar an' shore bored him twice."

"By thunder!" shouted Tom Day. "Where's Marvie? Come heah, you gun-slingin' kid!"

Marvie slipped off his horse and stalked forward to confront the three men. Hettie thrilled at sight of him.

Marvie, if he were any character at all, was surely Nevada. In look, in walk, in manner! He had a big black gun in his chaps pocket, and another smaller one in his belt.

"Son, what's this we heah?" asked Day bluntly. "Did you shoot Cedar Hatt?"

"Reckon I did" replied Marvie. "Here's his gun. It happened just about as Nevada told you."

"Who's Nevada?"

Marvie laid a hand on his friend.

"Oho! You mean Jim Lacy heah?"

"No, I mean Nevada" replied the lad stoutly. "That Jim Lacy handle doesn't go with me."

"Marvie, you speak for me," interposed Judge Franklidge. "He may indeed be Nevada and Jim Lacy. But for me he will always be Texas Jack. He has worked for me two years. And before that for Tom Day. We found him to be the best cowboy who ever threw a rope for us. And more—a splendid honest man whom it is my privilege to call friend—and whom I would be happy to take into my cattle business."

"Hey, you sheriff rustlers," boomed Tom Day with loud satisfaction, "did you heah that? Wal, listen to some more. Texas Jack volunteered to clean up this Pine Tree outfit. He had my backin'. He had Judge Franklidge's office behind him. He had free hand to become a rustler an' thief, to drink an' gamble an' shoot his way into the secret of the Pine Tree outfit. Do you savvy? There won't be any arrest. There won't be anyone danglin' on a rope."

The next afternoon Marvie hauled Hettie out under the trees.

"Hettie," he whispered, "I fixed it for you."

"Marvie! Are you—Oh, if you—"

"Keep in the saddle," he interrupted, shaking her. "Nevada just told me he was dyin' of love for you . . . There now, Hettie, don't look like that. I'm dead serious. Honest to God! Cross my heart! Didn't you make my Rose happy? Why, I'd go to hell for you. An' Nevada knows it. He's sufferin'. He thinks you ought to send for him, if you can forgive him for bein' Jim Lacy."

Hettie could only cling mutely to this glad-eyed boy who was torturing her.

"So I fixed it. You run out there across the bench," he went on, pointing with eager, trembling finger. "You know. There among the pines where I always find you. Go now. Nevada is watchin'. He'll come. I swore I'd get you there if I had to pack you. An' I will."

Hettie kissed his brown lean cheek, then ran wildly into the shelter of the pines. First she meant only to escape Marvie and all of them. But an irresistible magnet drew her to the secluded nook where she went so often alone to gaze out under the low cover of green to the purple sage and the changing radiance of the desert.

Nevada was there—somehow the Nevada of old. Hettie ran into his arms.

"I—love—you! I love you!" she cried imploringly. "Forgive me. It was my one failure. I was the weak one—not you."

Hours passed and sunset again widened its golden effulgence down over the sage hills to the rolling slopes.

Hettie and Nevada sat with their backs to the great pine tree, their cheeks together, their hands clinging.

"Ben sprung somethin' on me," Nevada was saying. "Why not all of us

rustle down to San Diego! Shore, it floored me—but I'd like you to get away from heah just now, for a little. So, darlin' Hettie, would I be askin' too much if—if—"

"No. Ask me anything," murmured Hettie.

"If I'd ask you to marry me?"

"If! Do you?"

"Shore. I reckon I'm darin' to."

"No," said Hettie.

He accepted that in startled silence.

"I mean no—you are *not* asking too much. Oh, Nevada! Yes! Yes!"

The last golden flare of sunset burned from over the darkening range.

"Arizona is smilin' at us," said Nevada, gazing at the sunset glow upon her rapt face.

"Nevada is smiling down upon me," she replied dreamily.

THE END

REDSKIN WRITING—*A Western Quiz*

IN THE PAST we've quizzed you readers on cowboy lingo, mountain-man talk, mining terms, and so on. However, we've rather overlooked an important character of the West—the Plains Indian. Now we make up for this lack with a quiz on Indian picture-writing. Like the universally understood sign language, this pictorial method of communication was easily grasped by all comers, regardless of the tongue they spoke. There are ten picture-symbols shown below, with the meanings scrambled up alongside. It's your job to match up each symbol with its correct meaning. It's easier than it may look at first, so we'll make seven right the passing mark; eight is good; and nine-ten brands you as *mug sabe* in Plains lore. Answers on page 135.

1. ABUNDANCE

2. LOYALTY

3. GOOD HUNTING

4. GOOD CROPS

5. CAPTIVITY

6. OMEN OF GOOD LUCK

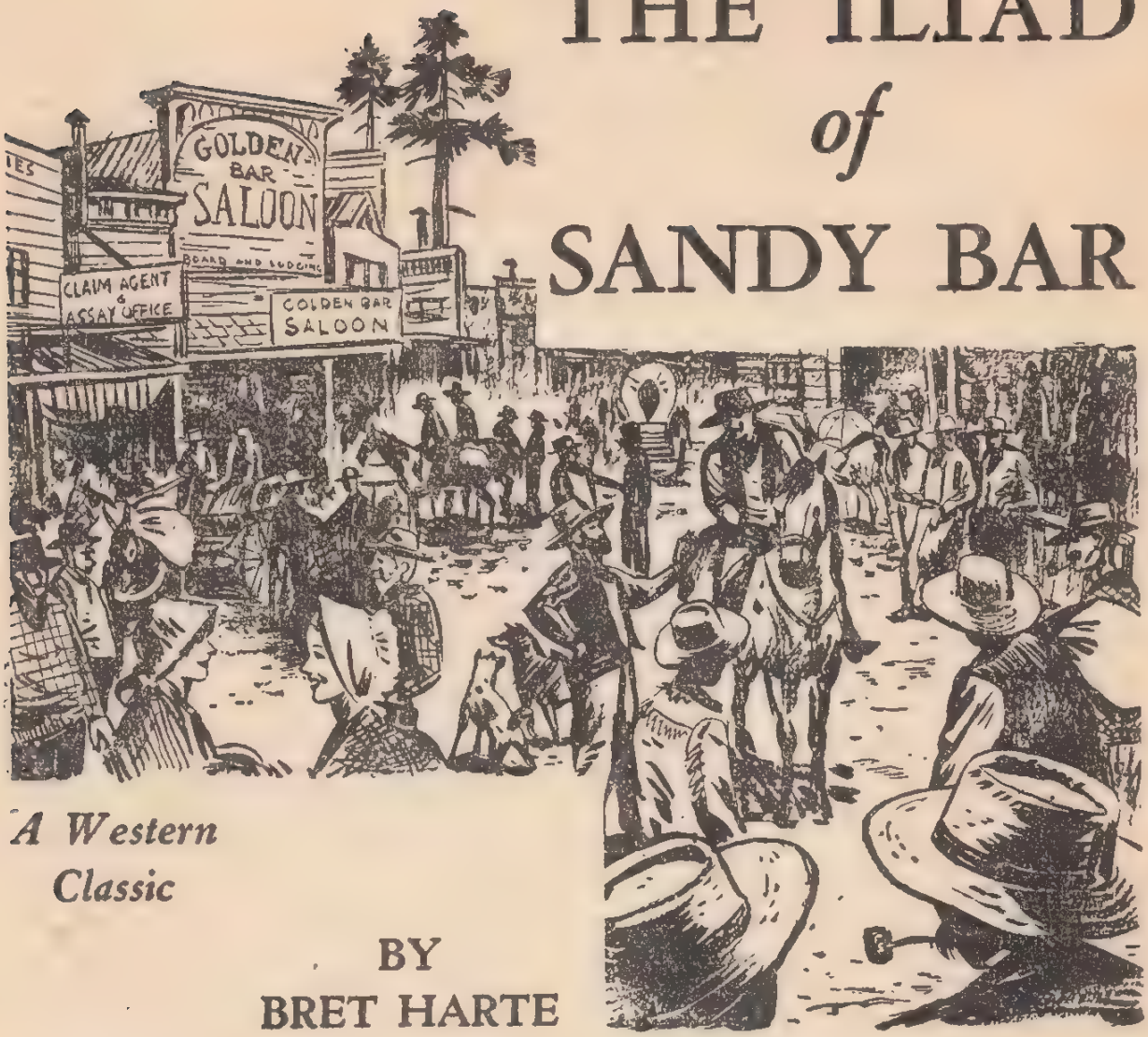
7. CAMP; HOME

8. JOURNEY

9. WISDOM

10. GUIDING

THE ILIAD *of* SANDY BAR



A Western Classic

BY
BRET HARTE

BEFORE nine o'clock it was pretty well known all along the river that the two partners of the "Amity Claim" had quarreled and separated at day break. At that time the attention of their nearest neighbor had been attracted by the sounds of altercations and two consecutive pistol shots. Running out, he had seen dimly, in the gray mist that rose from the river, the tall form of Scott, one of the partners, descending the hill toward the canyon; a moment later York the other partner had appeared from the cabin and walked in an opposite direction toward the river passing within a few feet of the curious watcher.

Later it was discovered that a serious Chinese cutting wood before the cabin had witnessed part of the quarrel. But John was stolid, indifferent, and reticent. "Me choppee wood, me no fightee," was his serene response to all anxious queries. "But what did they say, John?" John did not *sabe*.

Colonel Starbottle deftly ran over the various popular epithets which a general public sentiment might accept as reasonable provocation for an assault. But John did not recognize them.

"And this yer's the cattle," said the Colonel, with some severity, "that some thinks oughter be allowed to testify ag'in' a White Man! Git—you heathen!"

Still the quarrel remained inexplicable. That two men, whose amiability and grave tact had earned for them the title of "The Peacemakers" in a community not greatly given to the passive virtues—that these men, singularly devoted to each other, should suddenly and violently quarrel, might well excite the curiosity of the camp. A few of the more inquisitive visited the late scene of the conflict, now deserted by its former occupants. There was no trace of disorder or confusion in the next cabin. The rude table was arranged as if for breakfast; the pan of yellow biscuit still sat upon that hearth whose dead embers might have typified the evil passions that had raged there but an hour before.

But Colonel Starbottle's eye, albeit somewhat bloodshot and rheumy, was more intent on practical details. On examination, a bullet hole was found in the doorpost, and another, nearly opposite, in the casing of the window. The Colonel called attention to the fact that the one "agreed with" the bore of Scott's revolver, and the other with that of York's derringer.

"They must have stood about yer," said the Colonel, taking position, "not more'n three feet apart—and missed!"

There was a fine touch of pathos in the inflection of the Colonel's voice, which was not without effect. A delicate perception of wasted opportunity thrilled his auditors.

But the Bar was destined to experience a greater disappointment. The two antagonists had not met since the quarrel, and it was vaguely rumored that, on the occasion of a second meeting, each had determined to kill the other "on sight." There was, consequently, some excitement—and it is to be feared, no little gratification—when at ten o'clock, York stepped from the Magnolia Saloon into the one long, straggling street of the camp at the same moment that Scott left the blacksmith's shop at the forks of the road. It was evident, at a glance, that a meeting could only be avoided by the actual retreat of one or the other.

In an instant the doors and windows of the adjacent saloons were filled with faces. Heads unaccountably appeared above the river banks and from behind boulders. An empty wagon at the crossroad was suddenly crowded with people, who seemed to have sprung from the earth. There was much running and confusion on the hillside. On the mountain road, Mr. Jack Hamlin had reined up his horse and was standing upright on the seat of his buggy. And the two objects of this absorbing attention approached each other.

"York's got the sun"—"Scott'll line him on that tree"—"He's waitin' to draw his fire," came from the cart; and then it was silent. But above this human breathlessness the river rushed and sang, and the wind rustled the treetops with an indifference that seemed obtrusive. Colonel Starbottle felt it, and in a moment of sublime preoccupation, without looking around, waved his cane behind him, warningly to all nature, and said, "Shu!"

The men were now within a few feet of each other. A hen ran across the road before one of them. A feathery seed-vessel, wafted from a wayside tree, fell at the feet of the other. And, unheeding this irony of nature, the two opponents came nearer, erect and rigid, looked in each other's eyes, and—passed!

Colonel Starbottle had to be lifted from the cart. "This yer camp is played out," he said gloomily, as he affected to be supported into the Magnolia. With what further expression he might have indicated his feelings it was impossible to say, for at that moment Scott joined the group.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked of the Colonel, dropping his hand, as if with accidental familiarity, on that gentleman's shoulder.

The Colonel, recognizing some occult quality in the touch and some unknown quantity in the glance of his questioner, contented himself by replying, "No, sir," with dignity.

A few rods away, York's conduct was as characteristic and peculiar. "You had a mighty fine chance; why didn't you plump him?" said Jack Hamlin, as York drew near the buggy.

"Because I hate him," was the reply, heard only by Jack. Contrary to popular belief, this reply was not hissed between lips of the speaker, but was said in an ordinary tone. But Jack Hamlin, who was an observer of mankind, noticed that the speaker's hands were cold, and his lips dry, as he helped him into the buggy, and accepted the seeming paradox with a smile.

When Sandy Bar became convinced that the quarrel between York and Scott could not be settled after the usual local methods, it gave no further concern thereto. But presently it was rumored that the Amity Claim was in litigation and that its possession would be expensively disputed by each of the partners. As it was well known that the claim in question was worked out and worthless, and that the partners, whom it had already enriched, had talked of abandoning it but a day or two before the quarrel, this proceeding could only be accounted for as gratuitous spite. Later, two San Francisco lawyers made their appearance in this guileless Arcadia and were eventually taken into the saloons and—what was pretty much the same thing—the confidences of the inhabitants. The results of this unhallowed intimacy were many subpoenas, and when the Amity Claim came to trial all of Sandy Bar that was not in compulsory attendance at the county seat came there from curiosity. The gulches and ditches for miles around were deserted. The trial, in the languages of the plaintiff's counsel, "was one of no ordinary significance, involving the inherent rights of that untiring industry which had developed the Pactolian resouces of this golden land," and in the homelier phrase of Colonel Starbottle, "a fuss that gentlemen might hev settled in ten minutes over a social glass, ef they meant business; or in ten seconds with a revolver, ef they meant fun." Scott got a verdict, from which York instantly appealed. It was said that he had sworn to spend his last dollar in the struggle.

In this way Sandy Bar began to accept the enmity of the former partners as a lifelong feud, and the fact that they had ever been friends was forgotten. The few who had expected to learn from the trial the origin of the quarrel were disappointed. Among the various conjectures, that which ascribed some feminine influence as the cause was naturally popular, in a camp given to dubious compliment of the sex.

"My word for it, gentlemen," said Colonel Starbottle, who had been known in Sacramento as a Gentleman of the Old School, "there's some lovely creature at the bottom of this." The gallant Colonel then proceeded to illus-

trate his theory by divers sprightly stories which I refrain from transcribing here.

But it would appear that even the Colonel's theory was fallacious. The only woman who personally might have exercised any influence over the partners was the pretty daughter of "Old Man" Folinsbee of Poverty Flat, at whose hospitable house both York and Scott were frequent visitors. Yet into this charming retreat York strode one evening, a month after the quarrel, and beholding Scott sitting there, turned to the fair hostess with the abrupt query, "Do you love this man?"

The young woman returned that answer, at once spirited and evasive, which would occur to most of her sex in such an exigency, and without another word York left the house.

"Miss Jo" heaved the least possible sigh as the door closed on York's curls and square shoulders and then, like a good girl, turned to her insulted guest. "But would you believe it, dear?" she afterward related to an intimate friend, "the other creature, after glowering at me for a moment, got upon its hind legs, took its hat and left, too; and that's the last I've seen of either."

The same hard disregard of all other interests or feelings in the gratification of their blind rancor characterized all their actions. When York purchased the land below Scott's new claim and obliged the latter, at a great expense, to make a long detour to carry a tail-race around it, Scott retaliated by building a dam that overflowed York's claim on the river. It was Scott who, in conjunction with Colonel Starbottle, first organized that active opposition to the Chinese which resulted in the driving off of York's Mongolian laborers; it was York who built the wagon road and established the express which rendered Scott's mules and pack trains obsolete; it was Scott who called into life the Vigilance Committee which expatriated York's friend, Jack Hamlin; it was York who created the Sandy Bar *Herald*, which characterized the act as a "lawless outrage" and Scott as a "Border Ruffian"; it was Scott who, at the head of twenty masked men one moonlight night, threw the offending forms into the yellow river and scattered the types in the dusty road.

These proceedings were received in the distant and more civilized outlying towns as vague indications of progress and vitality. In the Poverty Flat *Pioneer* for the week ending August 12, 1856, the editor, under the head of "County Improvements," said: "The new Presbyterian Church on C Street, at Sandy Bar, is completed. It stands upon the lot formerly occupied by the Magnolia Saloon, which was so mysteriously burnt last month. The temple, which now rises like a Phoenix from the ashes of the Magnolia, is virtually the free gift of H. J. York Esq., of Sandy Bar, who purchased the lot and donated the lumber. Other buildings are going up in the vicinity, but the most noticeable is the Sunny South Saloon, erected by Captain Mat. Scott, nearly opposite the church. Captain Scott has spared no expense in the furnishing of this saloon, which promises to be one of the most agreeable places of resort in old Tuolumne. He has recently imported two new, first-class billiard tables, with cork cushions. Our old friend, 'Mountain Jimmy,' will dispense liquors at the bar. We refer our readers to the advertisement in another column. Visitors to Sandy Bar cannot do better than give Jimmy a call."

Among the local items occurred the

following: "H. J. York, Esq., of Sandy Bar, has offered a reward of $100 for the detection of the parties who hauled away the steps of the new Presbyterian Church, C Street, during divine service on Sabbath evening last. Captain Scott adds another hundred for the capture of the miscreants who broke the magnificent plate-glass windows of the new saloon on the following evening. There is some talk of reorganizing the old Vigilance Committee at Sandy Bar."

When, for many months of cloudless weather, the hard, unwinking sun of Sandy Bar had regularly gone down on the unpacified wrath of these men, there was some talk of mediation. In particular, the pastor of the church just referred to—a sincere, fearless, but perhaps not fully enlightened man—seized gladly upon the occasion of York's liberality to attempt to reunite the former partners. He preached an earnest sermon on the abstract sinfulness of discord and rancor. But the excellent sermons of the Rev. Mr. Dawes were directed to an ideal congregation that simply did not exist at Sandy Bar—a congregation of beings of unmixed vices and virtues, of single impulses and perfectly logical motives, of childlike faith and grown-up responsibilities. As, unfortunately, the people who actually attended Mr. Dawe's church were mainly very human, somewhat artful, more self-excusing than self-accusing, rather good-natured, and decidedly weak, they quietly shed that portion of the sermon which referred to themselves and, accepting York and Scott—who were both in defiant attendance—as curious examples of those ideal beings above referred to, felt a certain not altogether Christianlike satisfaction in their "raking-down."

If Mr. Dawes expected York and Scott to shake hands after the sermon, he was disappointed. But he did not relax his purpose. With quiet fearlessness and determination, he attacked Scott in his own house. What he said has not been recorded, but it is to be feared that it was part of his sermon.

When he had concluded, Scott looked at him, not unkindly, over the glasses of his bar, and said, less irreverently than the words might convey, "Young man, I rather like your style, but when you know York and me as well as you do God Almighty, it'll be time to talk."

And so the feud progressed, and as in more illustrious examples, the private and personal enmity of two representative men led gradually to the evolution of some crude, half-expressed principle or belief. It was not long before it was made evident that those beliefs were identical with certain broad principles laid down by the founders of the American Constitution, as expounded by the statesmanlike A.—or were the fatal quicksands on which the ship of state might be wrecked, warningly pointed out by the eloquent B. The practical result was the nomination of York and Scott to represent the opposite factions of Sandy Bar in legislative councils.

For some weeks past the voters of Sandy Bar and the adjacent camps had been called upon, in large type, to RALLY! One day, with fife and drum, and flaming transparency, a procession filed into the triangular grove at the head of the gulch. The meeting was called to order by Colonel Starbottle, who, having once enjoyed legislative functions and being vaguely known as a "warhorse," was considered to be a valuable partisan of York. He concluded an appeal for his friend with an

enunciation of principles, interspersed with one or two anecdotes so coarse that the very pines might have been impelled to pelt him with their cast-off cones as he stood there. But he created a laugh, on which his candidate rode into popular notice, and when York rose to speak he was greeted with cheers. But to the general astonishment the new speaker at once launched into bitter denunciation of his rival. He not only dwelt upon Scott's deeds and example as known to Sandy Bar, but spoke of facts connected with his previous career, unknown to his auditors. To great precision of epithet and directness of statement the speaker added the fascination of revelation and exposure. The crowd cheered, yelled, and were delighted, but when this astounding philippic was concluded there was a unanimous call for "Scott!"

Colonel Starbottle would have resisted this manifest impropriety, but in vain. Partly from a crude sense of justice, partly from a meaner craving for excitement, the assemblage was inflexible, and Scott was dragged, pushed, and pulled upon the platform.

As his frowsy head and unkempt beard appeared above the railing, it was evident that he was drunk. But it was also evident, before he opened his lips, that the orator of Sandy Bar, the one man who could touch their vagabond sympathies, stood before them. A consciousness of this power lent a certain dignity to his figure, his very physical condition impressing them as a kind of regal unbending and large condescension. York's myrmidons trembled.

"There's naught, gentlemen," said Scott, leaning forward on the railing, "there's naught as that man hez said as isn't true. I was run outer Cairo; I did belong to the Regulators; I did desert from the army; I did leave a wife in Kansas. But thar's one thing he didn't charge me with, and maybe he's forgotten. For three years, gentlemen—I was that man's partner!"

Whether he intended to say more no one knew; a burst of applause artistically rounded and enforced the climax, and virtually elected the speaker. That fall he went to Sacramento, York went abroad, and for the first time in many years distance and a new atmosphere isolated the old antagonists.

With little change in the green wood, gray rock, and yellow river, but with much shifting of human landmarks, and new faces in its habitations, three years passed over Sandy Bar. The two men, once so identified with its character, seemed to have been forgotten.

"You will never return to Sandy Bar," said Miss Folinsbee, on meeting York in Paris, "for Sandy Bar is no more. They call it Riverside now, and the new town is built higher up on the riverbank. By the by, I hear that Scott has won his suit about the Amity Claim and lives in the old cabin, and is drunk half the time. Oh, I beg your pardon," she added, as a flush crossed York's sallow cheek, "but bless me, I really thought that old grudge was made up. I'm sure it ought to be."

It was three months after this conversation, and a pleasant summer evening, that the Poverty Flat coach drew up before the veranda of the Union Hotel at Sandy Bar. Among its passengers was one, apparently a stranger—in the local distinction of well-fitting clothes and closely shaven face—who demanded a private room and retired early to rest. But before sunrise next morning he arose and, drawing some

clothes from his carpetbag, proceeded to array himself in a pair of white duck trousers, a white duck overshirt, and straw hat. When his toilet was completed he tied a red bandanna handkerchief in a loop and threw it loosely over his shoulders. The transformation was complete. As he crept softly down the stairs and stepped into the road, no one would have detected in him the elegant stranger of the previous night, and but few have recognized the face and figure of Henry York of Sandy Bar.

In the uncertain light of that early hour, and the change that had come over the settlement, he had to pause for a moment to recall where he stood. The Sandy Bar of his recollection lay below him, nearer the river; the buildings around him were of later date and newer fashion. As he strode toward the river he noticed here a schoolhouse and there a church. A little farther on, the "Sunny South" came in view, transformed into a restaurant, its gilding faded and its paint rubbed off. He knew now where he was and, running briskly down a declivity, crossed a ditch and stood upon the lower boundary of the Amity Claim.

The gray mist was slowly rising from the river, clinging to the treetops and drifting up the mountainside, until it was caught among those rocky altars and held a sacrifice to the ascending sun. At his feet, the earth, cruelly gashed and scarred by his forgotten engines, had, since the old days, put on a show of greenness here and there, and now smiled forgivingly up at him, as if things were not so bad after all. A few birds were bathing in the ditch with a pleasant suggestion of its being a new and special provision of nature, and a hare ran into an inverted sluice-box as York approached, as if it were put there for that purpose.

He had not yet dared to look in a certain direction. But the sun was now high enough to paint the little eminence on which the cabin stood. In spite of his self-control, his heart beat faster as he raised his eyes toward it. Its window and door were closed, no smoke came from its adobe chimney, but it was else unchanged. When within a few yards of it, he picked up a broken shovel and, shouldering it with a smile, strode toward the door and knocked. There was no sound from within. The smile died upon his lips as he nervously pushed the door open.

A figure started up angrily and came toward him—a figure whose bloodshot eyes suddenly fixed into a vacant stare. whose arms were at first outstretched and then thrown up in warning gesticulation—a figure that suddenly gasped, choked, and then fell forward in a fit.

But before he touched the ground York had him out into the open air and sunshine. In the struggle, both fell and rolled over on the ground. The next moment York was sitting up, holding the convulsed frame of his former partner on his knee ,and wiping the foam from his inarticulate lips. Gradually the tremor became less frequent, and then ceased, and the man lay unconscious in his arms.

For some moments York held him quietly thus, looking in his face. Afar, the stroke of a woodman's ax—a mere phantom of sound—was all that broke the stillness. High up on the mountain, a wheeling hawk hung breathlessly above them. And then came voices, and two men joined them.

"A fight?" No, a fit—and would they help bring the sick man to the hotel?

And there, for a week, the stricken partner lay, conscious only of the visions wrought by disease and fear. On the eighth day, at sunrise, he rallied, and opening his eyes, looked upon York and pressed his hand; then he spoke:

"And it's you. I thought it was only whisky."

York replied by taking both of his hands, boyishly working them backward and forward, with a pleasant smile.

"And you've been abroad. How did you like Paris?"

"So-so. How did *you* like Sacramento?"

"Bully."

And that was all they could think to say. Presently Scott opened his eyes again.

"I'm mighty weak."

"You'll get better soon."

"Not much."

A long silence followed, in which they could hear the sounds of woodchopping, and that Sandy Bar was already astir for the coming day. Then Scott slowly and with difficulty turned his face to York and said:

"I might hev killed you once."

"I wish you had."

They pressed each other's hands again, but Scott's grasp was evidently failing. He seemed to summon his energies for a special effort.

"Old man."

"Old chap."

"Closer!"

York bent his head toward the slowly fading face.

"Do ye mind that morning?" Scott asked.

"Yes."

A gleam of fun slid into the corner of Scott's blue eyes as he whispered:

"Old man, thar *was* too much saleratus in that bread."

These were his last words. When the sun, which had so often gone down upon the idle wrath of these foolish men, looked again upon them reunited, it saw the hand of Scott fall cold and unresponsive from the yearning clasp of his former partner, and it knew that the feud of Sandy Bar was at and end.

The Sheriff and the Slavers

By John E. Kelly

TRAMPAS COUNTY'S *head lawman shucks his shield so he can tangle with a touchy "federal question"—and enforces a few state laws in the bargain. First publication.*

SHERIFF 'NEEL O'CALLAHAN cocked spurred heels on the desk in his official cubbyhole. "Lawdogging's either a feast or a famine," he said, smothering a yawn. "Not a call in three weeks. Looks like a mighty dull summer."

"Thar's a grizzly killin' stock up in the Loblollies." Rod Frane, top hand at the Humpbacked Y and occasional deputy sheriff, rolled a cigarette and lit it with a hell stick. "What say we go—" He broke off, squinting through the sulphur fumes. The door was opening slowly, silently.

O'Callahan slammed his boots on the floor and yanked the knob with his left hand, his right hovering in readi-

ness over the Webley .455 holstered Mountie-fashion high on his hip. An Indian swayed on the threshold, a tall young brave with cheeks mottled gray by exhaustion. His ragged levis were caked with trail dust, blood matted his bare head and blotched his shirt. He pulled a crumpled paper from his belt.

"Big trouble—reservation," he croaked, glassy-eyed, and collapsed into O'Callahan's arms.

"Get Doc Fox and your hoss, Rod!" the sheriff snapped. "You're deputized." O'Callahan laid the unconscious man on the floor and took the paper from his limp fingers. Scribbled in pencil its hasty lines were addressed to him.

Sheriff, Trampas City

A band of desperadoes who have been kidnaping Indian children from the mountain tribes attacked this Reservation last night, killing squaws and unarmed men. Lieutenant Fenton, commanding the soldiers here, will not pursue them, claiming his orders are to guard against Indian uprisings only. In the name of humanity I appeal to you. The slavers are crossing Trampas County southward. The band is at least five men and they have seven children.

A. R. Hanson, *Agent*
Picaro Reservation.

Doc Fox bent over the brave, clipping coarse black hair from a long slash in the scalp.

"Bullet only creased him," the sawbones announced. "He's lost a lot of blood, but barrin' pneumony, he'll pull through." Fox poured a slug of whisky down his patient's gullet, cauterized the wound from the same bottle, and applied a bandage. "This 'un 's big enough to be a Picaro," he commented. "Ain't seen one in a coon's age. They stick right close to the reservation."

"He brought a message from the agent," the Sheriff replied, handling it over.

"Slavin', hey?" The medico grew reminiscent. "Likely you wouldn't know, comin' recent from Canady, but Abe Lincoln's Proclamation freed a lot of redskins. When I was a young feller, most all the big ranches and a sight of town folks, too, had Injun slaves. 'Bound for service,' they called it—indentured. Some never did give it up and there's tradin' in kids goin' on yet in the backwoods."

O'Callahan's mobile lips set in a taut white line. "Mebbe we can put a crimp in that," he said, taking his .30-.30 from its rack. He addressed Frane. "Hanson says they're heading south from the Reservation. The bastards can't make much time with the kids, 'cross country, even if they stole hosses to carry 'em. I figure we can turn off the wagon road at the Bald Hills onto the Wildwood trail and catch up with 'em around Madrone Valley."

"Be a mite keerful," counseled Fox. "Injuns are gov'mint wards and Uncle Sam's techy as a teased snake 'bout peace officers hornin' in on federal trouble."

"You read what Hanson says, the bluecoats won't move," the sheriff protested.

Doc Fox shrugged. "Nobody gets excited over a passel of Injun brats," he said. "Too many toes might get trod on if the matter was opened up. The kidnapers ain't never bothered. They got influence whar it counts."

"You think red skin keeps an Injun mother from missing her kid?" asked the sheriff. He went on slowly, as though communing with himself. "The day the judge made me a citizen, I was proud, 'cause in the States everybody gets a fair shake. I want to keep that

feeling. But I won't get the county into trouble." He unpinned his star, dropping it into a drawer. "There's no law saying plain 'Neel O'Callahan can't hunt kyotes."

Staring breathlessly, Frane broke in. " 'Neel, I—" he began.

"You're un-deputized, Rod," the spare reddish man told him.

"You can't deal me out thataway!" Frane replied explosively. "I'm a-comin'! For them that needs killin', a cowpoke's lead is just as bad medicine as a deputy's."

"Good man!" said O'Callahan, touched, his ice-blue eyes softening. He took a cartridge box from his desk. "Fill your gun belt an' we'll hightail!"

The Bald Hills and sunset lay behind. In the second hour of darkness O'Callahan and Frane halted their mounts for a breather, eating a cold dry snack in the saddle. They were well out on the Wildwood trail, in heavily forested country corrugated washboard fashion by parallel flat-topped ridges. The cold light of western stars stippled the black world with patches of dim gray, affording the keenest vision neither focus nor dimension.

"We're losing no time," said O'Callahan, standing in one stirrup to rest. "The hosses can't more'n feel their way. Come moonrise, we'll travel."

From the shrouded ridge abutting on the trail, a torn rag of sound floated down. Half scream, half sob, it rose swiftly in pitch and volume, stopping in mid-note as though choked off.

"Painter," said Frane uneasily.

"The hosses ain't bothered. They'd be r'aring if a cougar was that near," O'Callahan replied, *sotto voce*. "It could just be—" He broke off, weighing a fantastic surmise.

"Injun kids don't yell less'n they're hurt mighty bad," Frane completed the thought.

The older man stared at the height. "There's one spot where the sky over the ridge seems a mite lighter," he said.

"And not where the moon's comin' up," agreed Frane.

O'Callahan dismounted swiftly. "You stay with the hosses, Rod," he ordered, "whilst I have a look-see. If you hear shooting, come up fast."

It was ink-black in the forest and the slope had the pitch of a steep roof. O'Callahan felt his way from tree to tree, pulling himself upward by purchase on their trunks. He came out suddenly on the flat top of the ridge and stood panting, staring with unbelieving eyes.

Under the high, widespread limbs of a great cedar, a small fire burned brightly. In silhouette on the near side, picketed horses strained tentatively at their ropes or hungrily nuzzled the powdery soil. The flickering light picked out six small Indians, square Mongolian faces set stoically, huddled on a fallen log. Their rigid pose held O'Callahan's scrutiny. Their laps were empty, hands tied behind their backs by ropes passing under the log to bind their ankles.

The seventh small Picaro lay on his back before the fire, writhing fiercely but vainly in the grip of a pair of bearded whites holding his feet and arms. Another man poked the blazing coals with an iron rod. Three men, thought the watcher; Hanson's note had said five. O'Callahan's farsighted gaze probed the shadows for the others when a voice spoke from the firelight.

"Hurry up, Tully," it commanded,

"this little varmint's slippery as a greased eel."

The firetender lifted his branding iron, glowing cherry red, and bent over the struggling boy. A huge black-bearded man forced a small fist open, flaming metal seared the palm, the odor of burning flesh came sickeningly to O'Callahan. As the boy relaxed, fainting, Tully pressed the brand against his bare thigh.

Rage and horror swept the watcher, wiping out his recent past. He was no longer an American civilian, but Corporal O'Callahan, clothed in the Northwest Mounted's red coat of authority and contempt for odds.

"In the King's name!" he cried, snatching the Webley from its holster.

Dazzled by the firelight, O'Callahan's first racing stride betrayed him into a stump hole. He crashed into the underbrush, half stunned. A heavy body fell upon him wrenched the gun away and wrestled his arms behind his back, where a second man lashed them to O'Callahan's belt. Dragging their captive, the pair hustled him toward the fire, where their three companions waited guns in hand.

One of O'Callahan's custodians addressed the giant who had opened the Picaro's fist.

"Me 'n' Jink seen this feller when he come up the hill, Boss," he said, "we was jest fixin' ter jump him when he goes loco, figurin' ter clean out Mulvaney's Terrors by hisself."

"Dally your tongue, Mike!" barked the big man. "Careless namin' can hang you quick as a rope. This feller ain't dead—yet—and neither is his ears."

The man called Boss turned to O'Callahan. "What you doin' around here?" he demanded.

"Hunting," replied 'Neel curtly.

"Whar's your hoss?" continued blackbeard. "What's your name?"

O'Callahan stared silently at the giant, cursing himself for his foolhardiness. His only chance to outshoot the quintet had been to pick them off from ambush in the shadows.

A lean blond man with hot eyes pulled his knife. "The dirty son's tongue ain't no good to him, he don't use it none," he snarled. "I'm cuttin' it out."

The huge Mulvaney seized the hothead's arm. "Haul in your neck, Eb," he ordered. "No use doin' in bits what we'll handle all to oncet."

Tully inspected the captive closely. "I seen the Trampas sheriff close up," he said. "This 'un is his spittin' image."

"He ain't got no star," demurred Mike.

"The Trampas lawdog's a Canuck," declared Jink. He held out the Webley. "It's him all right. Lookit this Limey gun he was packin'."

"The—!" Eb cried. "Let's drill him with it right now."

Mulvaney vetoed that. "T'ain't likely he'd be afoot here, alone," he said. "Shootin' 'd bring the others."

"Hang him, then," the blond man insisted. "Thet's quiet."

The boss was obdurate. "It's onhealthy, sleepin' whar rope meat's hung up to dry. But in the mornin' we'll leave him gurglin' in a hemp collar—if he don't choke hisself. Fix him a Chinook necktie, boys."

Eb and Jink threw O'Callahan on his side. Gagging him with his neckerchief, they slipped a rawhide noose about his neck, pulling it skin tight. Jink forced O'Callahan's feet back until his knees creaked, while the blond man lashed the rawhide about the cap-

tive's ankles. Mulvaney inspected their work.

"Let's see your King get you loose, Canuck," he gibed, driving an oversize boot into O'Callahan's ribs. "When your legs goes to sleep, straighten 'em out, an' the rope'll choke off your windpipe, savin' us the trouble." Kicking the captive again, Mulvaney gave his band orders for the night.

"You set up the first couple o' hours, Mike," he said. "Then Eb'll spell you. Keep your eye peeled; if them varmints hightails, I'll cut your gizzard out."

In O'Callahan's worm's-eye view, the seven little Indians drooped like weary birds on their log. Rolled in blankets, the slavers slept feet to the fire. Mike prowled the camp, keeping up the blaze, checking ropes and knots, inspecting the mounts, scouting the encircling forest. An interminable time later he held a stout silver watch to his ear and to the firelight, then bent over a muffled figure, shaking him awake.

The blond man protested, sat up groggy and hairtrigger-tempered. Pulling his blanket close about his shoulders, he stared hypnotically into the flames. His head drooped forward, jerked upright, sagged again. Eb's nods grew deeper and longer, his resistance feebler. His head touched his knees and remained. The sentry slept.

O'Callahan watched the slumbering Eb with grim envy. The chill of the mountain night struck through his clothes, icy dew beaded his face. He lay sleepless with an insomniac intensity that ached his eyeballs, ravelling a puzzle without solution. He knew Mulvaney's kind; the giant would carry out his threat before dawn, with O'Callahan helpless as a hog-tied calf.

The captive's only chance lay in sudden violent action; long since, the knifelike stab of cramps had dulled to numbness that deadened his arms and legs. Striving to induce circulation, he moved his toes within their boots taking infinite care lest he flex his knees. But the slight movement dragged on the taut rope. The noose dug into his neck muscles half smothering him.

Lack of blood had so numbed O'Callahan's nerves that they did not register the first slackening of his bonds. But his alert mind accepted matter-of-factly the touch of steel on his neck as a knife slit noose and gag. He heard Rod Frane's soundless whisper.

"Can you walk 'Neel?"

O'Callahan's plans were made instantly. "Hide behind the Injun kids" he replied in the same tone "and cut 'em loose when you see me move. I aim to get me a gun."

As Frane faded back into the forest to circle the fire, O'Callahan cautiously limbered his members, while holding his pose. Shooting pains and violent stinging sensations accompanied the returning blood; the muscles of his biceps and thighs trembled uncontrollably.

At Eb's feet the backlog collapsed, showering him with sparks. He awoke, panic-stricken to find the fire shrunk to a bed of coals and the camp in darkness. Vividly aware of the consequences should the captives be missing, the blond man hurried to the log and struck a match. Seven wan faces turned to him, streaked with childish tears shed in the secrecy of night. Eb's relief turned to rage against the Picaros. Little so-and-so's mighta got him shot, if they'd hightailed it. His fist smashed into the nearest face. From behind the great cedar, Frane lined the

slaver in his sights, then held his fire, recalling O'Callahan's orders.

Eb's elation faded swiftly. The Canuck! Mulvaney would razoo him sure if he'd let the lawdog get away. With eyes attuned to darkness, O'Callahan saw the slaver coming and braced himself. Eb bent low over the prostrate man, striking a hell stick. The sulphur had scarcely flared when 'Neel's left hand shot upward, seizing Eb's neckcloth at the throat. He put his weight behind a sharp downward pull. Taken off balance, the slaver sprawled beside O'Callahan, plowing gravel with his nose. Before he could move, O'Callahan's right passed behind Eb's near shoulder, driving a rabbit punch into his nape. The slaver's neck snapped back. He was out cold.

O'Callahan rolled Eb on his back, hurriedly unbuckling his gun belt and searching his pockets for a knife. If his luck held another minute—At a crouching run 'Neel reached the horses, which shied and plunged at his coming, slashing their picket ropes. Passing into the forest, he loosed a reasonable facsimile of a panther's scream, stampeding the terrified animals toward the sleeping slavers.

Frane joined O'Callahan as a wild burst of firing broke out under the cedar. Streaks of flame slashed the dark, random slugs sprayed the forest. A yell punctuated the volley.

"I'm shot!" The voice sank to a bubbling groan.

"Drilled in the lungs," whispered O'Callahan. "We can tick that one off."

"What now?" asked Frane.

"We'll bring up our hosses and catch a wink of sleep," O'Callahan replied. "Mulvaney's Terrors won't walk far in high heels, 'specially when they ain't sure how many's laying for 'em. Likely they'll get to whittle-whanging among themselves over losing their plunder and save us some more lead."

"Them Injun kids scattered like a covey of quail when I cut 'em loose," Frane said. "You figure they'll find their way home?"

"A redskin's born with a compass in his head," O'Callahan assured him.

The false dawn was faintly gray overhead when 'Neel roused Frane. The moon was down and night lay unbroken under the trees.

"We'll move in on their camp with the first light," he said. "If Mulvaney's still there, they figure on locating their hosses. If they walked out last night, they ain't gone far and have left plenty sign."

A hundred feet apart, converging on the great cedar, the Trampasans slipped soundlessly through the woods. None challenged them, the campfire's ashes were stone-cold. Frane made the first discovery. Behind the log that had held the seven small Picaros captive, he stumbled over the body of the man called Jink. A weasel darted away from the pool of blood. The dead man's gun and belt were missing.

"Eb has a shooting iron again," O'Callahan surmised, "making up for the one I took from him."

"One of 'em's got your Webley, too," Rod reminded him.

"Which is likely to help us," O'Callahan answered. "That model has crippled men who didn't have the hang of it."

As he spoke the dawn breeze stirred the dense foliage of a live oak growing on the farther slope of the ridge. A bulky object fell, thudding on the ground. Guns in hand, 'Neel and Frane circled the spot cautiously before

moving in. A saddle lay at the foot of the tree. Rod took a hand up and climbed through the lacquered spiny leaves.

"They's four more saddles cached here," he reported.

"Bring up our hosses whilst I cut for sign," O'Callhan said.

The marks of boot heels dug in deeply to hold purchase on the steep slope, of brush broken in careless stumbling haste, quartered the lay of the land toward the Wildwood trail. Leading the gelding, O'Callahan stopped to study a clear print on bare ground.

"Made after dewfall," he told Frane. "They haven't much start on us."

At the foot of the ridge they mounted and moved through breast-high sagebrush. O'Callahan rode ahead, tracing the Terrors' flight, Frane ten paces in the rear, searching the foreground and the flank of the next ridge for telltale movement of vegetation. A bush swayed as the gelding passed. Not noticing the second rider, Mike arose from ambush, training his gun on O'Callahan's back.

Frane made a lightning-fast cross draw, snatching the single-action Colt he carried butt forward on his left side. Slow thinking and slow acting, the slaver was still throwing down on 'Neel when Rod's bullet found its target. Hot lead in his brain, Mike sank back into the bush.

Bristling as she-bears flushed in a berry patch, the remaining Terrors rose from hiding for the showdown they could no longer delay. Dispersed in a V-shaped line, with Mulvaney in the point farthest ahead, they had O'Callahan in a crossfire.

"I'm a-pluggin' you with yer own gun, Limey!" shouted Eb, leveling the heavy short-barreled Webley. He struggled with the newfangled double action, thumbing the hammer while squeezing the trigger. In his nervous haste the shot went wild, echoed by a frantic yell.

"Me thumb's broke!" Eb cried, dropping the Webley.

Frane gave him no rest. Spurring his mount, the puncher went after him, as if the blond man were an outlaw steer holed up in brush country. To have both hands free, Rod tied his rope to the saddle horn. Nursing his broken thumb, Eb saw him coming and hightailed for the ridge, dodging through clumps of tan oak and scrub cedar where the horseman must lose time in detours. Frane's first throw missed when the loop snagged on a branch as the fugitive ducked. Recovering his fling-line, Rod herded his quarry to a part of the gulch where stony soil stunted the sagebrush and thinned the cedars, to try again with a hooley-ann.

Puffing and half blinded by sweat, Eb broke from cover of the scrub. Ahead for twenty feet the sagebrush was no more than knee-high. Thereafter, he was safe in the tangle of fallen trees and boulders at the foot of the ridge, where no horse could follow. The thought gave him renewed strength for a final burst of speed.

Frane saw the darting figure, swung a small loop in one quick whirl over his head and threw. His aim was true. The rope came over Eb with the loop flattened and dropping straight down. Before the blond man could dodge, the rope tightened about his body, pinning his elbows to his sides. Rod hurtled from the saddle, wrestled Eb to the ground and tied him hand and foot with saddle strings.

"If you ain't here when I come back," he told the prisoner, "I'll hunt

you cl'ar to Mexico and tie you down with lead next time."

Forking his horse with a running jump Frane rushed to even the odds for O'Callahan.

In the shoulder-high sagebrush the slavers exposed only their heads while the mounted O'Callahan made a target as plain as the Rock of Gibraltar. 'Neel took a near miss from Tully slid from his saddle and ducked under cover for a few paces to leave the gelding out of the line of fire. Bobbing up again, he pulled the gun he had taken from Eb and tried quick snap shots at both enemies. The slugs went wild. The long-barreled Colt '73, chambered for .44 cartridges, had a different "feel" and its hair trigger was strange to a finger accustomed to the solid pull of the Webley. Before O'Callahan could fire again, the slavers had disappeared. He followed suit and on hands and knees the three men hunted each other in the deep shade of the thicket.

Creeping forward cautiously, Colt in hand, O'Callahan caught a movement where Tully should be and fired at a hand's-breadth of shirt front. The bullet grazed a bough in the maze, deflected, and slid through a sleeve. 'Neel saw a gun fall to the ground.

"Boss," Tully yelled, "the son's drilled my shootin' arm."

As the bad news reached Mulvaney, bushes thrashed in his immediate rear.

"The Limey's posse got us surrounded," he roared. "Hightail it, Tully. I'm a-gettin' out!"

The giant scrambled to his feet, a second late. His head met the chest of Frane's plunging roan with a spine-cracking shock. When Mulvaney came to, he was trussed beside Tully and Rod was bringing in the sullen Eb.

"Whatcha fixin' ter do with us?" the blond man demanded, as the Trampasans tied their prisoners to Frane's rope.

"Walk you back to the reservation," replied O'Callahan.

"That's gov'mint propitty; you ain't got no authority—" Tully protested, but 'Neel cut him short.

"If five beans in the wheel ain't enough authority," he said, tapping the recovered Webley, "there's plenty more in the belt."

O'Callahan mounted, holding the rope. "You pick the trail," he told Frane, "whilst I ride herd on these hombres. Move right along, they'll get plenty of rest where they're going."

The mountains and the forest ended together on a rimrock facing limitless unclouded sky. The Picaro Valley stretched maplike below, ringed by sagebrush hills. Blue and white by turns, lined by willows, the River Lampa plodded between cornfields and pasture. A maze of hogans clustering about the ordered white agency buildings marked the reservation. Frane, leading, turned in his saddle.

"Sure is pretty country," he called over the heads of the prisoners. "Hey, thet Injun town's bigger'n Trampas City!"

"Five-six hundred," O'Callahan replied, "or was, before Mulvaney shot it up."

Red-eyed and riled, the giant broke in.

"Pretty!" he mocked. "This'd be God's country, sure 'nuff, 'ceptin' for you sneakin' Injun-lovers!"

"Save your jawing for the court," O'Callahan ordered. "Move faster!"

"I can't," complained Tully, limping, "My whole feet is one blister."

"Like those hands you branded?" O'Callahan inquired dryly. "Try walking barefoot."

The trail wound down to the valley floor, making a staircase of the foothills. The lowest was a knoll just outside Reservation town, covered by the Indian cemetery. By the Great White Father's law, departed braves and squaws were laid in ordered rows.

Christian burials bore crosses of everlasting thorn or *madrone*, bound with rawhide; pagans confided in charms of knotted horsehair or cougar teeth encased in the bottles of other departed spirits. Freshly turned earth covered a line of graves beside the trail. A group of children, mooning among the mounds, stared at the file of white men, huddled chattering together, then fled at top speed, heading for town.

"Rod!" called O'Callahan urgently. "What kids were those?"

"Injuns look alike to me," replied Frane. "But I noticed when they seen Tully, they hid their hands."

Before the outermost cabins, O'Callahan changed places with Frane and took the lead. The trail became a rutted lane, lined by pig and man-proof fences of prickly pear. Where it opened into a dusty square before the Agency, a group of swarthy figures grew rapidly as Picaros hurried from all parts of town.

Half the tribe was on hand as the silent procession passed. The Indians ignored the riders, concentrating their attention on the shuffling captives. Braves stared silently, murder in their heavy-lidded eyes. Squaws danced and shrieked with rage; childish trebles screamed indictment of Mulvaney's Terrors. The crowd inched forward, hemming in the whites.

"You're fixin' ter get us scalped," protested Mulvaney, cringing.

"Not while in my custody," O'Callahan told him. "After that I'll shed no tears."

'Neel and Frane pulled their guns. The Picaro advance halted, outcries subsided to a sullen mutter, clutching red hands dropped. Emerging unscathed, O'Callahan reined in beside an infantryman leaning on his musket in bored minimum of sentry-go.

"Where's Agent Hanson?" 'Neel asked.

"Down on the Coast, lookin' fer peace and quiet so's he can write a letter to Washington," said the bluecoat contemptuously. "Seems like naughty white mans made wolf meat outa some o' Hanson's red pets and our lieutenant wouldn't do anything about it." He bit on a fresh chew and looked curiously at the prisoners. "Whatcha bringin' in them hombres fer?"

"Making wolf meat outa Hanson's pets," replied O'Callahan in an even voice. "Where's Lieutenant Fenton?"

The soldier pointed across the open to a scene of building activity. "Palaverin' with the politico over by the new sutler's stores."

Thirty feet from his objective, O'Callahan halted.

"Keep Mulvaney and his Terrors quiet," he bade Frane, "whilst I talk turkey with the officer."

"Can do," the puncher assented. He hooked a knee about the saddle horn, laid his Winchester across his thigh and settled himself comfortably. "Bed down, hombres, and rest your hoofs," he told the prisoners.

O'Callahan rode on, studying the pair before him. The slight lieutenant's back was ramrod-straight, his fair Burnsides and mustachios meticulously trimmed. The civilian's glossy beaver hat and fine black broadcloth suit, the watch-chain looped across his paunch, the sparkler on his soft hand were good as money in the bank. A

top-rail finagler, 'Neel thought—trouble in polished boots.

Both men pointedly ignored O'Callahan as he dismounted, continuing their low-voiced conversation. Bristling internally, 'Neel confronted the officer.

"Lieutenant Fenton," he said, "I am 'Neel O'Callahan, returning three of Mulvaney's Terrors, who kidnaped the Picaro kids."

"Three?" interposed the civilian, giving O'Callahan his full frowning attention. "Where are the others?"

"Shaking hands with the devil," replied 'Neel curtly. He turned to the Lieutenant. "Will you accept delivery of the kidnapers?"

"Certainly not," Fenton said frostily. "This is most irregular; no warrants have been issued."

"More than irregular, Hal, illegal," the civilian said. "Mr. Mulvaney and his comrades are being forcibly detained on federal territory. You yourself might be sued for damages for permitting their detention."

Fenton flushed angrily. "Why do you bring them here?" he barked at O'Callahan. "Are you a peace officer?"

"Ye—" began 'Neel, tripped by habit. "Not right now," he finished lamely.

The civilian pounced on O'Callahan's hesitation. "He admits he has no authority," he said triumphantly. "More than likely he and his accomplice did the kidnaping and seized Mr. Mulvaney to cover their tracks."

'Neel felt himself in a nightmare. "Put your cards down," he snapped. "Who are you, anyway, calling that baby-killer, Mulvaney, 'Mister'?"

Fenton answered for the civilian. "This is Senator Kelwax, counsel to the Army Quartermaster."

"And member of the State Legislature," the politico added, glaring at O'Callahan with bulging gray eyes like those of a boiled cod. "Boss Mulvaney and his boys are from my district. A bit rough and ready, perhaps, given to horseplay, but no harm in them. That name, the Terrors, is only a joke. Hal, I counsel you to set them free."

"Immediately," Fenton agreed. He lifted his voice. "Sergeant!"

A grizzled veteran in fatigue dress emerged from the sutler's stores. "Sir?" he saluted.

The lieutenant pointed to Mulvaney's Terrors. "Cut their ropes."

Frane covered the sergeant with his rifle but stood aside at O'Callahan's order.

Kelwax took instant advantage. "Taking up arms against the uniform is rebellion," he declared. "I advise you, Lieutenant, to disarm and arrest these lawbreakers."

O'Callahan dropped his hand on the butt of his Webley. "Try it yourself, Kelwax," he invited. His ice-blue eyes traveled the length of the dandified lieutenant. "You don't seem to know, Mister," he rasped, "that civilians have the power of arrest when constituted authority fails in its duty. Agent Hanson asked my help after you refused to pursue the kidnapers." He held out the Indian Agent's note.

Fenton's icy superiority wilted. "I've only seventeen men," he said defensively, "counting three on the sick list. To police this whole howling wilderness, I'd need more force."

"Here's three recruits," returned O'Callahan, as Mulvaney's Terrors approached. "Might as well enlist 'em, you've got to protect 'em. The Picaros will lift their hair if they leave the barracks."

Mulvaney had recovered his swaggering arrogance. "Back to your hogan, squaw man," he shouted as O'Callahan put a foot to stirrup. "I'm comin' to Trampas City some day and put windows in your skull!"

"Step off federal territory and you'll find a warrant waiting," warned O'Callahan, "for the killing of Jink."

"What's this, Boss?" put in Kelwax. "Jink dead? Surely you didn't—"

Amid a turmoil of shouted explanations and denials by the Terrors, O'Callahan mounted and joined Frane, riding slowly across the square.

"What now?" asked Rod.

"I don't know," O'Callahan confessed. "I hate to believe it, but it looks like Doc Fox was right when he said nobody gets excited over a passel of Injun brats."

" 'Ceptin' other Injuns," commented Frane, pointing to the crowd of Picaros. "Look, 'Neel, they's all bucks now. When the squaws hit fer home, hell with the hide off is a-comin' up pronto."

Behind them a non-com's whistle shrilled. The sentry shouldered his musket and left his post. Passing the horsemen, he glanced up briefly.

"If you've the sense God gave little apples," he said, patently doubting it, "steer clear o' them Injuns. They're in a horn-tossin' mood."

A solid mass of glowering Indians blocked the outlet to the trail. Before them a tall young brave with bandaged head stood beside a fantastic figure swathed in a puma pelt, with bare arms and legs daubed orange-red by cinnabar. The medicine man's matted gray hair hung to his shoulders. A snakeskin circlet bound his temples, festooned with shells and beads, holding two outsize eagle feathers. His left hand gripped a ceremonial lance tipped with a razor-keen obsidian blade, his right extended palm forward inviting to powwow.

O'Callahan halted when his sorrel's nose was a yard distant. "How," he said gravely.

The young brave replied. "You friend," he said, touching his bandage. He shifted his glance to Frane. "Boy say you cut um loose. Chief say you go now."

"Looks like this is a private scrap," O'Callahan said wryly to Frane. "Nobody wants us around."

The bandaged brave uttered a phrase in his tribal tongue that opened a way through the crowd. The whites rode silently out of town.

The Trampasans were crossing the graveyard knoll when the first shots sounded, faint with distance, no louder than corn popping or a Picaro squaw cracking pinon nuts. They swung about and watched, with the emotions of halfbacks exiled to the sidelines. A dark mass of men surged across the square in Reservation town; tiny clouds of black powder smoke puffed from the whitewashed walls of the agency. The Indians fell back, leaving sprawled figures behind came on again. The sutler's stores went up in flames.

"Rod," said O'Callahan, "if you were Mulvaney, which way would you run?"

"I wouldn't," replied Frane, ruffled.

"I take it back," 'Neel apologized. "You wouldn't, but Mulvaney will, and pronto, while the fighting's hot. He can count up to fourteen as well as Fenton, and knows what the Injuns will do after they break in and get a-hold of him. Even if Tully and Eb have more guts, they're no help with

crippled gun arms. So I figure the three Terrors will drag it together."

"Where'd they get hosses?" objected Frane, with a saddle slicker's inability to vision a journey otherwise. "Them sojers is footers."

"Mulvaney won't need a hoss when he thinks of Picaro scalping knives," O'Callahan replied. "'Sides, they can slip away better crawling through the brush."

"After dark?" Rod inquired.

O'Callahan shook his head. "Kelwax won't let them wait that long. He aims to save his own bacon."

Frane looked his question.

"The lieutenant can't hold out over an hour, the agency is too big to man," 'Neel explained. "The Picaros want the Terrors, and a riled Injun is a careless counter. If there ain't been too many killed before they break in, they'll likely not bother the bluecoats, but any civilian they find will get his hair lifted. Kelwax is too soft and fat to hit the breeze. I figure he knows his only chance is to get Mulvaney's gang away, then persuade Fenton to ask a truce so the Picaro medicine man can see the Terrors ain't there. No Terrors, no more fight."

"Suppose Mulvaney won't go?" Frane asked.

"He will," replied O'Callahan confidently. "Mulvaney's got a Chinaman's chance if he runs for it, none at all if the Picaros catch him in the Agency. The best he could expect would be staking on an anthill, with honey trails leading to his eyes. If that ain't prospect enough to move him, a big politico like Kelwax could get murder warrants on account of the Injuns the Terrors killed when they raided the Reservation, and Mulvaney knows it. He'll do what Kelwax says."

"I hate to see that gang get off scot-free, after all they done!" Frane exclaimed.

"I asked which way you figured they'd run," said O'Callahan dryly.

Rod sat up excitedly. "I mighta known you wasn't pullin' out, when you let on to be!" he said. "I figure Mulvaney'll hit for the Coast. That's the quickest way outa Injun country."

O'Callahan and the young puncher left the trail and rode across country, following the reservation's border into the western foothills. Opposite the Picaro town they halted in a scattering stand of tan oaks and *madrone*, growing among house-size boulders broken from the rimrock above. Behind them the sun sank toward the long sweep of the Coast Range; ahead and far below, movement in the square was veiled by the smoke of the burning stores.

'Neel frowned as his farsighted eyes searched the slope at his feet; his hunch might have a hard time proving itself. The steep rise was furrowed and gouged with deep gullies and dry washes, branching repeatedly in their upper reaches. Greasewood and mesquite grew thickly in the gulches, the intervening ridges and hillocks were bare save for sparse tufts of stunted sage. If the slavers slipped into a ravine they could move unseen up the hillside. A score of gullies reached the elevation at which the Trampasans stood, on a front of a mile. It was impossible to patrol them all; Mulvaney's Terrors had nine chances in ten of making their getaway.

Tiny figures appeared at the edge of town, hurrying toward the deltas of dry sand at the mouth of the ravines. The slavers, thought O'Callahan exultantly. He was in time. Almost instantly he knew himself wrong. The figures

were too numerous, a half dozen at least and too small.

"Kids," said O'Callahan, pointing them out to Frane. "What do you figure they're up to, pirooting around out there, when they've got a scrap to watch in town?"

"They act like cat hounds castin' about for a lost scent," Rod answered.

"That's it!" exclaimed O'Callahan. "Mulvaney's took to the brush already. If the kids strike his trail, half our work's done."

The six small figures were strung out in a line, working uphill, searching the sand for bootprints. Near the mouth of a large gully one stopped and waved his arms, calling his companions. They milled about the sign, then a pair darted back to town. The others trotted up the slope, keeping to the ridge beside the gulch where the open ground made the going easier.

"Mulvaney's picked the best gorge—for us," O'Callahan said, dropping his voice, for sounds carried far in the thin mountain air of the windless afternoon. "It only forks once and both head into these rocks."

Frane peered cautiously through a screen of poison oak. "They're takin' the left," he whispered. "I seen—yeh, it's Eb, all right. That's his black lid and wipes."

The Trampasans took cover on either side of the gorge, on the lip of a natural terrace. The last thirty feet of the ravine, a waterfall in winter, rose precipitously, a devil's ladder choked with boulders and splintered logs. Mulvaney appeared below, followed by Eb and Tully, crawling and clawing their way upward.

"He'p me, Boss," besought Tully, blocked by a shoulder-high step of stone. "I ain't got no grip in my bum wing."

"Then you ain't no use ter me," replied Mulvaney, puffing as he levered himself over the brink. "I ain't no nursery."

The giant rose to his feet, stretching colossal arms above his head. "We've give them red ——s the slip," he cried exultantly. "An' I'd give a pretty to see the face on that damn Limey Sheriff."

He caught O'Callahan's eye and froze in outraged incredulity.

"Take a good look, Mulvaney, but keep your hands up," O'Callahan invited. "It's free, like your board will be from now on." He moved the Webley's muzzle toward Eb and Tully. "Reach, gents," he commanded, "Rod Frane behind you's got a bad case of trigger itch."

The giant frothed. His mouth worked but no words came. Tully filled in for him.

"You can't touch us," he said. "The bluecoat cut us loose when you took us to the reservation."

"And it was sure nice of you boys to hurry back," O'Callahan replied sardonically. "When you crawled over the lip, you're in Trampas County and under arrest."

"What fer?" growled Mulvaney, catching his breath.

"Leaving out what Uncle Sam might do to you later," O'Callahan itemized, "there's manslaughter — remember Jink? And kidnaping, forcible detention, mistreatment of minors, torture. That's just a starter. I'll think up more between here and the county seat."

"We ain't a-goin'," the giant roared. "You said yourself the lip's the line. One jump and we're on gov'mint property. And you better not shoot while we're jumpin'."

"A good argument," admitted O'Callahan. "Only one thing wrong with it."

"What?" sneered Mulvaney.

'Neel waved his free hand toward the brink. "Look!" he said.

The lower slope boiled with Picaro braves, brandishing muskets and war clubs, racing uphill.

The giant's jaw dropped.

"You g'arantee to pertect us?" he quavered.

O'Callahan nodded. "I'll get you to the jail house with your hair on."

"Let's get goin', then," Mulvaney cried urgently. "Them Picaro sons is a-comin' too fast to stop at the line."

The CIMARRON

By Clarence Edward Flynn

Its shores have echoed with the tramp of herds,
And shouts of cowpokes, and crisp orders flung
In rapid volleys of imperious words
By tired herd bosses with impatient tongue;
The mad stampede with all its thundering roar,
The beat of horse hoofs turning back the flight,
The campfire song when daylight was no more,
Even the guarded silence of the night.

Scouts and explorers moved along its ways,
Crossed and recrossed it in their constant quest,
Telling the world in those old, rugged days
Where was the gateway to the Great Southwest.
It keeps its counsel as it rambles far
Across a land so silent and so vast;
But every bend and ripple, ford and bar,
Recalls some moment of a mighty past.

LONG RIDER LAUREATE

By W. H. Hutchinson

TIBURCIO VASQUEZ, *last of the great California road agents, had a career as long as it was gamey. This account of his lusty exploits was written especially for ZGWM.*

THE CALIFORNIA DAY was bland and sunny with just a trace of morning's coolness in the sheltered reaches of the winding road. It was a day to soften the heart of a tax collector, but Mr. Michael Madigan was immune to the climate. He halted his rig in a strategic location when he spotted a rider coming toward him up the grade and congratulated himself.

The rider gave the courteous greeting of his people as he came abreast of the halted rig. Madigan acknowledged it with a grunt and raised his voice.

"Not so fast, greaser!" said Mr. Michael Madigan.

The rider halted his mount, a golden gelding with flax mane and tail, and eased his slender, wiry body in his ornate saddle. A square face and undershot jaw diminished the prominence of high cheekbones. A thatch of coarse black hair was caught up beneath a silver-ornamented sombrero in a silk square after the olden fashion of *Californios*. The beginnings of a smile stirred the corners of a wide, traplike mouth beneath a scraggly black mustache. The rider had no words.

Mr. Michael Madigan took his silence for the passive submission of an inferior race. "You paid your poll tax?" he snapped.

The rider shook his head almost idly.

Madigan produced his official receipt book. "I'll take two dollars," he said firmly.

The rider produced the money from a well-filled belt, and lifted his bridle reins.

"Hold on," cried Madigan, "you got to get your receipt." These *Californios* were like children!

The rider checked his horse and waited silently.

Madigan almost exploded. "What's your name?" he roared.

The smile on the rider's face escaped

beaneath his mustache. "My name is Tiburcio Vasquez, Senor," he said courteously, and bowed forward in his saddle.

Mr. Michael Madigan began to tremble like a dog swallowing peach pits. The day was no longer bland and sunny, and the very chill of death ran up his spine and seeped into the marrow of his four long bones. He was an important personage clothed with official dignity and tax-righteousness no longer. He was just Mike Madigan, one puny human alone on a lonely road with the most notorious bandit in California.

If Vasquez saw the stripped and shivering soul of the man before him, his sharp eyes gave no sign. "*El papel, Senor,*" queried Tiburcio mildly—"the paper that says I have paid my tax like a good citizen?"

Madigan tore out a blank receipt and thrust it over blindly. Vasquez took it and bowed from the waist. Madigan's nerve could take no more; better to be killed like a rabbit in flight than to wait for he knew not what. He slapped the team with the reins and bolted down the grade.

Tiburcio Vasquez looked at the paper in his hand snd smiled to himself. A poll-tax receipt was hardly necessary to a man who voted his own six-shooter ticket throughout California. He observed the headlong flight of the lurching rig and smiled more broadly as he lifted his reins and resumed his unlawful occasions. Tiburcio Vasquez had a sense of humor to match his daring.

It took him a long time to hit his stride outside the law, but when he did, he made far apart tracks. Most important, Vasquez did his deeds at a time when California prided itself on being far more civilized than the raw, unsettled West that separated it from the rest of the nation. The gold of '49 and the silver torrent from the Comstock Lode had brought California fame, population, railroads, telegraph lines, and an acute sense of property rights by the early 1870's. So it was adding downright insult to positive injury when Tiburcio Vasquez, with twenty years' unlawful experience and unsurpassed knowledge of the country, rode merrily into history at a place with the unCalifornialike name of Soap Lake.

The Gilroy-Visalia stage was well-laden one summer day in 1871 as it rolled along the valley flats, reaching for the grade that would lift it over the Diablo Range into the San Joaquin country. The horses were fresh, the driver skillful, and the passengers prosperous.

The picture changed when three mounted, unmasked riders appeared out of the brush with hardware in their hands. The driver prudently halted. The spokesman for the riders invited the driver and his passengers to hit the road in passable English. The benumbed travelers stood by the coach like a line of ducks going to water, but with less noise.

The leader supervised his confederates as they took up a collection of money and other valuables; then he leaned forward in his saddle and issued more instructions in liquid Spanish. The two working bandits herded the captives into a near-by field, trussed them up, and left them threshing about in the half-grown grain. The three bandits then drove briskly away in the stage itself.

As they drove merrily down the road, the *bandidos* encountered a succession of freight teams. The teamsters, expect-

ing nothing worse from the coach than an oath to clear the road, fell easy prey. So did Thomas McMahon, a leading merchant of Hollister, who lost $750 but saved his buggy. The effrontery, the cool precision, of the whole affair was a little staggering but there was one ray of consolation. McMahon had recognized the leader of the trio as Tiburcio Vasquez a gambler of frequent appearances in the San Benito valley.

A hastily deputized posse made the mistake of surprising the bandits a few miles north of Santa Cruz. One posseman was killed one bandit was killed, and Vasquez himself was shot through the body. He escaped, as did his remaining companion in crime, by splitting off from one another. The posse followed Vasquez.

They felt sure that they would find his body dead of a mortal wound. After some thirty corpseless miles, they gave it up in the logical belief that he would die anyhow. Another man might have justified their faith in human frailty. Vasquez rode sixty miles from the scene of battle until he reached the broken, jumbled mass of tortured rock halfway down the Gabilan Range that is Pinnacles National Monument today. Here he recuperated while the forces of law and order untangled his back trail.

Vasquez had been born in Monterey in August, 1835, into a respectable but otherwise undistinguished family. After an ordinary childhood and some education, he gravitated into bad company at the age of sixteen, and had stayed in it ever since. The twenty-year span up to Soap Lake was filled with suspicions of horse theft, and at least one known term in San Quentin for cattle rustling. He had been a gambler more often than not, and a great hand with the ladies. The lawmen weren't getting much to work on until they uncovered a frustrated husband.

Senor Salazar had known of the manner in which Tiburcio earned his living for a long time, but since his own possessions were never troubled, and since Vasquez paid well for food and lodging whenever he needed it, the two men had been *muy amigo*. All this changed one day when Salazar returned from a brief absence and found his comely wife was gone. He put it down to feminine caprice until a friend told him the sad news—his wife had run away with Tiburcio Vasquez! Senor Salazar bided his time until Tiburcio got tired of amorous dalliance and the encumbrance of a woman, and returned to the San Benito valley alone. Senor Salazar buckled on his hogleg and went looking for the man who had done him wrong.

They met, exchanged words, and Tiburcio drew first. Salazar, or so he claimed, was the better shot and only interference by Tiburcio's cronies prevented him from putting more than one-hand-hammered slug into the man with sufficient animal magnetism to lure his wife from her bed, board, and couch. Discounting the natural anger of an outraged husband, the lawmen got some nuggets of pure information, and they began to get an inkling that Vasquez was more than a petty thief turned one-time desperado.

Vasquez was a man of daring, intelligence, and superb horsemanship who thought before he acted—thought well. He was the logical explanation for a lot of unsolved losses that had plagued the ranchers of three counties since 1852. A twenty-year record of living off of other people's portable property,

mostly *gringo* property, commanded respect, and proved that he had the ability to enlist and command followers.

Every *paisano* in California was Tiburcio's friend. They acted as his espionage, commissary, and remount services when necessary, and they furnished the manpower reservoir when he had a job too big for one man. When the job was done, they resumed their normal livelihoods of sheep-shearing, mining, or whatever, and many of them served Tiburcio only once. It was hard to break up a gang that was so elastic. It was hard to catch a man who thought as well as Tiburcio.

When he moved with stolen booty, a scout rode a thousand yards in front, and a rear guard the same distance behind. When they camped for the night, Vasquez rode off to sleep alone unless they were in some sure sanctuary. One of these was in the Pinnacles of the Gabilan Mountains; another was a little valley called *Saucelitos*, on the east side of the Diablo Range overlooking the San Joaquin. The other hide-out lay between these two, it was the New Idria quicksilver mine. The working force at New Idria were *Californios*, or *Sonorenses*, and Vasquez was safer among them than he would ever have been in church.

While the lawmen were digesting what they had learned. Tiburcio openly returned to his favorite San Benito valley. A friend of his, Jose Castro, kept a saloon and roadhouse on the stage. route to New Idria. Castro was well-known and established in his business. Tiburcio turned on the charm full blast and Jose fell from grace. He should have known better.

The stage from Gilroy was held up one fall morning with neatness and despatch by two men, one of them the unmasked Vasquez. There was no amateurish violence, and some of the unwilling contributors recognized Tiburcio, there being no gunplay to distract their attention. When the news got back to Hollister, Castro was nominated as Tiburcio's accomplice. A local Vigilante committee confirmed the nomination by hanging Castro to a convenient cottonwood outside his roadhouse.

Tiburcio was long gone with the lion's share of the loot when this happened, and the incident is typical of his operations. He used his friends, he took the booty, and his rule of thumb was pretty simple—Tiburcio was *numero uno*. These facts were generally known among his followers but they never turned him in and they followed him without complaint. He had something!

After Castro's untimely taking-off, Vasquez recruited a few friends and stole a large bunch of cattle from Henry Miller in Peach Tree Valley, at the lower end of the Gabilans. Tiburcio may have worked on the theory that Henry Miller, of Miller and Lux fame, could afford the loss. He was lord of the Double H and S Wrench irons, and master of an empire that eventually covered a million acres in three states. He and Tiburcio met more than once.

The stolen cattle wound up in winter quarters in *Saucelitos* valley. There was plenty of grass and water and it was handy to the frying pans of the New Idria mine. Also, it was a pleasant spot to entertain friends, male or female, until the ground dried out in the spring to make traveling easy and tracking hard.

When spring did come, Tiburcio worked his lone way north along the

Gabilans toward Pacheco Pass. Also in that spring Henry Miller put cash in his saddlebags and started east across Pacheco Pass to buy cattle in the San Joaquin. Miller traveled alone and unarmed as was his custom.

So, when a solitary rider accosted him with the time-honored command, Miller surrendered his money without complaint—as long as he had life, he could make more money. The bandit was about to ride away, considerably richer than before, when Henry Miller spoke.

"I haff a long rides to make," said Miller, "and I will need some moneys for my food."

The bandit had made long rides himself. He bowed courteously in his saddle and returned twenty dollars to Henry Miller for a road stake.

The remainder of 1872 was marked by a masterful inactivity on the part of Tiburcio, but not so with the lawmen. Henry Miller was a powerful political influence for activity.

Sheriff Adams of Monterey County took his deputy and went prowling about the New Idria mine on a hot tip early in '73. The sheriff had a hunch that the whites at the mine as well as the *latinos* gave Tiburcio a welcome. The miners did it out of racial loyalty; the whites for more profitable reasons. Tiburcio was welcome in return for not molesting the mine, its pay rolls, or its supervisory personnel.

The sheriff and his aide drew a blank and started back to Gilroy. They camped for the night at a spring near the road hobbled their horses and went to sleep. Next morning they were alive, but their horses were gone hobbles and all. Vasquez's jokes did not include murder.

Tiburcio had other plans afoot besides pranks on sheriffs. He was recruiting a gang for the spring campaign. He had learned that Henry Miller would be at Firebaugh's Ferry on the San Joaquin on a certain day to complete a large transaction for cash. On the day appointed Vasquez and four of his men drifted into the little town and waited for Miller. Miller unfortunately changed his plans and failed to appear. Tiburcio and his men then held up the town and looted it very methodically. It wasn't a very big town and the take wasn't enormous, but the principle was what made the newspaper stories so lurid.

These stories had scarcely died away in print when Tiburcio and his men held up the southbound stage from San Jose at Twenty-One Mile House. They not only relieved the passengers of their valuables they cleaned out the saloon patrons as well. The only way anyone got a drink to steady their nerves afterward was "on the house."

So far the Vasquez operations had been marked by timing, planning, skillful, execution, and lack of violence. Then came the looting of Paicines in the San Benito valley; one store-saloon, a hotel across the street, a saddle shop, and some scattered dwellings. The heat of August was still heavy on the town one afternoon about 5.30 when two riders swung off their horses before Snyder's Store. They looked like ordinary *vaqueros*, and they walked into the bar and ordered drinks. They were Tiburcio's front man—Leyvas, who had a pretty wife—and a new recruit named Gonzalez.

They had downed several rounds apiece when a third rider stepped through the doors with a gun in his hand. He was Teodoro Moreno, a sheep shearer by trade, and a Vasquez man

on occasion. Leyvas and Gonzalez drew their guns and the trio made the other occupants lie on the floor while they bound them and robbed their pockets. This operation was scarcely finished when Tiburcio drew rein in front with his *teniente*, one Chavez, nothing if not unprincipled. On being assured that all was under control, the two dismounted and stepped inside to supervise the looting. So far, this was a typical Vasquez operation.

Tiburcio himself was inspecting the tills in the store-saloon when a man stepped inside the door. Gonzalez ordered him to lie down; the stranger broke to run and Moreno shot him. It developed later that this first casualty was a Portuguese sheepherder who didn't savvy the local dialect.

In the flurry of excitement over this mishap, Vasquez stepped out on the porch just as a teamster pulled up before the hotel across the street. Tiburcio leveled his Henry rifle at the man and ordered him to dismount in English. The teamster was hard of hearing and woefully lacking in the meaning of a Henry rifle. He jumped off the wagon and ran toward the rear of the hotel. Vasquez ran after him and shot him.

The two killings gave the hotelkeeper, a man named Davidson, a case of the jitters. As Vasquez came back around the corner of the hotel, Davidson slammed the door and forgot to step clear of it. Tiburcio pumped one shot through it and Davidson was dead. That made three killed from their own mistakes in less time than it takes to write it, and the aftermath was fatal to Tiburcio.

The Vasquez men held Paicines until nine o'clock that night, and when they left, they took eight spare horses and a pack-jack laden with provisions. Tiburcio knew that this night's work meant long riding; knew, too, that murder was a different crime from just robbery even in the eyes and minds of his friends. The *bandidos* hit a ground-covering pace, clear down across the Tehachapi Mountains into some rugged sandstone crags above Mint Canyon, northwest of Acton today. Only Vasquez and Chavez made it to this hide-out, the other three dropping off along the way as either they or their horses played out.

A double-barreled posse pursued the gang. One barrel scoured the Diablos around New Idria and worked over into the Gabilans. The other barrel, under Sheriff Adams, had better luck.

Adams stuck to the trail across the Diablos and on into the San Joaquin. When he reached Bakersfield, he used the telegraph to ask Sheriff Rowland of Los Angeles County to meet him on the other side of the Tehachapis with more men and fresh horses. Their intelligence service brought them a lead on Vasquez's hide-out and if a posseman had not fired too soon, they might have caught him then and there. As it was, Tiburcio and Chavez made a clean getaway on fresher horses than the posse's. The posse gave up, separated, and returned to their respective districts, with an understanding that they would work together if any new information came to light.

Sheriff Adams went north across the Tehachapis with bitter thoughts in his mind. When he reached Delano Station in the San Joaquin, a pleasant surprise awaited him. Leyvas had given himself up and was waiting for Sheriff Adams. Leyvas talked just as volubly, and just as venomously, as had Salazar a few years earlier. Tiburcio had

alienated Senora Leyvas from her husband. It may have been pleasant for Tiburcio, but Leyvas got a more final vengeance than had Salazar.

His information brought the lesser lights of the Paicines robbers to book, and the triple killings very conclusively barred Tiburcio from his favorite scenes in the San Benito valley. He looked elsewhere.

On November 13, 1873, Tiburcio and Chavez rode calmly into the town of Millerton in the Sierra Nevada foothills where the Stockton-Los Angeles road forded the San Joaquin River. When they left no one had been killed but some fifteen persons had been thoroughly robbed. The effect of this raid was to net Tiburcio and his *teniente* close to $1000—and to enlist another sheriff on the side of the opposition.

A long month later, the town of Kingston on the south bank of the turbulent Kings River celebrated Christmas Day with an added reason for rejoicing. The ferry across the river that had supported the community for twenty years had been replaced by a toll bridge. All that remained to do before the opening ceremonies was the erection of the toll gates themselves. So Kingston celebrated Christmas and recovered the day following, at least from celebrating.

When the night of December 26th shut down on Kingston a knot of riders pulled up on the north bank and eyed the new bridge with distrust. Their leader detailed men as horse holders and the remainder, about a dozen all told, walked softly and quickly across the bridge. The next thing Kingston knew it had been captured by Vasquez.

His followers performed their appointed tasks with effective speed. Thirty-nine men were bound hand and foot, and the three stores in town were adequately pillaged. One store alone netted more than $2000, and the individual losses were never tabulated. When the job was done, the bandits went back across the bridge—without paying tolls—mounted their horses, and disappeared into the night. This raid capped the career of Tiburcio Vasquez and the public outcry was terrific—*There oughtta be a law!*

This public pressure moved the legislature to drastic action. Besides, Vasquez's next move might well be the capture of Sacramento and the legislators! Governor Booth was authorized to expend a reward of $8000 for Tiburcio alive, or $6000 for him dead. The legislators must have remembered the furore over the true identity of Joaquin's pickled visage twenty years before and thus felt that a twenty-five percent reduction in the reward would ensure a real live Vasquez for positive identification.

The first effect of the reward was to put a private posse into the field disguised as government surveyors. They scoured all of Tiburcio's old hangouts and worked clear down into the Tehachapis, to no avail. Their operations, however, did have the effect of keeping Vasquez south of the Tehachapis because his own espionage service kept him informed on their whereabouts. The other effect of the reward money was cumulative and worked in conjunction with the murders committed at Paicines. Many once-still tongues were loosened, and many once-firm friends were such no longer. But if Tiburcio saw the handwriting on the wall, he didn't act it.

The Coyote Hole Station on the Owens Lake-Los Angeles road that carried the rich traffic from the silver

strike of Cerro Gordo, lay on the southeast side of the Sierra Nevada, handy to the desert country. A dozen men manned it for the stage company, and on February 24, 1874, they looked into the muzzles of two Henry rifles and did not argue. The only conscientious objector was a gent by the name of "Old Tex." He swore by The Alamo that no greaser could give him orders.

Tiburcio quelled this incipient mutiny by shooting Old Tex in the leg. Then he and Chavez waited for the stage to pull in for a change of horses. When it did, its passengers were politely robbed, bound, and left behind while Tiburcio and Chavez rode southward toward the sandstone crags they had used before. On their way, the two men held up the northbound stage from Los Angeles as it toiled up Soledad Canyon. Then, they rode boldly into the town of Soledad and stole a wagon, teams, and appropriate harness. Sheriff Rowland took the field again, stirring his spies into greater activity.

The three-year campaign against Vasquez had taught the lawmen one sure thing. They could neither outride nor out-think Tiburcio; they had to substitute the patient plodding detective work of counter-spy. On the night of May 14, 1874, it finally paid off. The lawmen got a tip that Tiburcio was paying a visit to a lady friend in a house ten miles north of Los Angeles, across Cahuenga Pass. Some lawman must have remembered the trick Vasquez had used at Soap Lake, because next morning, when it was light enough to tell friend from foe, a wood wagon rolled down the road and stopped before the house that held Tiburcio. The possemen jumped from under the load of pickets and surrounded the house before Vasquez was fully awake.

Tiburcio must have known of the difference in reward money between Vasquez alive and Vasquez dead. Maybe he counted on this $2000 difference to impair the posse's aim; maybe he just had the gamecock's inability to quit without fighting. Whatever his reasoning, Tiburcio made a break from the back door to reach his saddled horse. Some accounts claim he was wounded in eight places, others that a single well-placed bullet brought him down. The net results were the same in either case —Tiburcio Vasquez, California's last long rider in the old tradition, had come to the end of the lawless trail he rode for almost a quarter-century.

Since the killings at Paicines took first place in the roster of his misdeeds, and since San Benito County had no secure jail facilities, Tiburcio was lodged in the city jail at San Jose on July 26, 1874, and stood trial in that city. The fall term of court heard his case, but for lack of prosecution witnesses, it was put over until the next term of court opened in January.

Tiburcio passed the interval pleasantly enough. He was a personage in California, a sure-fire source of newspaper copy, and the curious thronged the jail to see him. They were happy to buy autographed daguerrotypes of the great man from Tiburcio himself, and the proceeds kept Tiburcio in cigars and other small luxuries. He willingly discussed his raids with interested peace officers but always maintained that he had not done the killings at Paicines. Also, he refused to divulge his associates' names that had not been spilled by the vengeful Leyvas.

The accounts of his life and misdeeds invariably played up his powers as a Lothario, with the result that a goodly number of his visitors were women of

all kinds, classes, creeds, and attainments. The same held true when his trial opened on January 5, 1875. The galleries were jammed and a disgusted court attendant estimated that ninety percent of the audience was women.

By present-day standards, Tiburcio's trial was all too brief. The jury brought in their verdict after only four hours' deliberation on January 9th. Leyvas was the star witness for the prosecution and despite the best forensic efforts of Tiburcio's attorney, the jury did their duty. Vasquez was sentenced to death by hanging. The usual appeals were taken and denied, and as a last resort the Acting Governor of California, Romauldo Pacheco, was petitioned for executive clemency. This was denied and Tiburcio knew that the game was up.

If he was a chicken-livered coward, as many of his detractors maintained, he didn't show it. He personally inspected his coffin to make sure it was big enough. On his last morning, when Sheriff Adams brought him a new pair of black trousers, Tiburcio put them on with the comment, "They are too tight, but *no le hace*. I won't wear them very long."

On the morning of March 19, 1875, after a good sleep and a hearty breakfast, Vasquez led the procession to the gallows with a sure stride. He helped the hangman adjust the noose, said his final prayers, and was dropped into eternity. Three doctors were on hand to pronounce him officially dead and the witnesses included the sheriffs of four California counties, detectives from Wells-Fargo and the Central Pacific, officials from the state prison, and visiting peace officers from Nevada and Montana. The State of California was making damn sure that Tiburcio Vasquez was really and truly dead. And that is the way it stands on the books today. Yet—

Thirty years after they hanged Tiburcio Vasquez in San Jose, California, Tom Rynning, Arizona Ranger Captain, believed that he had found him, still alive, on a great ranch along the Arras River in Old Mexico. And today, tourists who visit the Pinnacles National Monument in the Gabilan Range above the San Benito valley, ask the Rangers if anyone has beaten them to the buried treasure of Tiburcio Vasquez. If there was a treasure buried there, it's there yet, but from the evidence it seems certain that the gamecock of California loved living far too well to hoard his money. And besides, he must have known that he would never need a stake for a peaceful old age.

Answers to "Redskin Writing" Quiz on page 104

1. Good hunting (deer track).
2. Abundance (mountain).
3. Journey (horse).
4. Wisdom (snake).
5. Captivity (rope).
6. Loyalty (sun).
7. Omen of good luck (swastika).
8. Good crops (rain).
9. Camp, home (teepee).
10. Guiding (morning star).

FAIR TRADE

By Bill Gulick

THE LADY MISSIONARY *plays havoc with mountain man Luke Marlow's get-even plans when she decides to put some teeth into the moral law. A ZGWM original short.*

THE YEAR that the fur company held rendezvous in the valley of the Green River, Luke Marlow came down out of the mountains with blood in his eye and murder in his heart. Late on a warm July afternoon he rode into the encampment, trailed at a respectful distance by his Shoshone squaw, Singing Bird, four pack horses loaded with beaver pelts, and three young male offspring the latter of which viewed the lodges of the assembled Indians, mountain men, and fur traders with the bright-eyed curiosity of three young coons out for their first look at the big, big world.

Trapping had been unusually good in the Tetons that winter. What with the price of pelts sky-high because of the fad for beaver hats in such faraway places as St. Louis, Cincinnati, and New York, Luke should have been

happy. But he wasn't. Viewing the camp with a jaundiced eye, he felt mean enough to tangle with a grizzly bear and give the bear the first two bites. The reason he felt that way was because he'd got skinned in a trade. And it had taken five years to find it out.

The mountain man's face was grizzled and lined, his eyes old with a wisdom not borrowed out of books, and his iron-hard sinews those of a young man. In his near-fifty years, he had ridden over a hill or two, and the mere fact that he had kept his hair long enough for the waist-length plaits hanging down the back of his buckskin shirt to turn gray was evidence enough that he had some savvy. In short, Luke Marlow wasn't a man who skinned easy. Still, he *had* been skinned. By an Indian, at that.

Luke spat, thinking about it, and if the spittle had been as bitter as the taste in his mouth, all the sagebrush and grass in sight would have curled up and died. That fat, sly, lying Beaver Head, he brooded. It just went to show you couldn't ever trust an Injun. Particularly a Shoshone. Most particularly a Shoshone who happened to be your own squaw's father.

He picked a camping-spot on the flat down near the river and told Singing Bird to set up the lodge there as soon as she'd taken off the packs and staked the horses out to graze. He didn't look at her directly. He hadn't looked at her directly since she'd had the fever some months ago. Not that she was exactly ugly. When he had bought her from Beaver Head five years ago, she had been as slim and pretty as any young Indjan woman he'd ever seen, and she'd kept her face and figure about as well as you could expect. Until lately—Well . . .

He found company headquarters after a brief search. Chief Clerk McNary sat in the shade of the canvas awning in front of the low stone building, a big, white-haired Scot with gentle eyes and a slight burr in his voice. He greeted Luke cordially.

After the customary pleasantries had been exchanged, Luke said, "The Shoshones here?"

"Aye. A week, past."

"Where'll I find Beaver Head?"

McNary told him, then added with a kindly smile, "I imagine Singing Bird is looking forward to a visit with her relatives."

"I dunno nothin' about that," Luke grunted, "but *I'm* shore plumb anxious to see Beaver Head. That oily, double-blasted, teetotally damned—"

Luke suddenly broke off and his jaw dropped in surprise as a woman came out of the store. She was tall and wore a long-sleeved gray gingham dress. Her face was kindly but firm, her eyes quietly observant, and, as he stared at her, she gave him a smile that revealed even white teeth. Luke knew he hadn't ought to gape so, but he just couldn't help himself; after all, it had been ten years since he had seen a white woman.

"Hello," she said, her face coloring under his stare. "Is there something wrong with me?"

Luke fumbled for his hat. "Ma'am, I shore beg yore pardon. You kind of took me by surprise. I didn't know there was a white woman this side of Westport."

McNary, unaccountably ill at ease, rose and introduced the woman as Miss Emily Brent, lately of Boston. The board of one of the eastern churches had appointed her to journey out to the Oregon country to establish a

mission among the Nez Perces, he explained, and she had been escorted this far by the fur company. Luke gathered from the Scot's tone that he did not approve, but Miss Brent had the look of a woman perfectly capable of taking care of herself. She smiled at Luke.

"You are a trapper?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Perhaps you could help me, then. You're familiar with the Indians?"

"Not too familiar," he said. "It don't pay."

A frown touched her face. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

He scratched his head. No, he didn't reckon she would understand. How if you and your squaw lived too close to her relatives, first thing you knew they'd all move in on you. How they'd borrow your powder and your extra pair of britches and your extra horse without bothering to ask for them, and then get real hurt when you wanted them back. How they'd skin you out of your eyeteeth if you gave them half a chance.

"Beggin' yore pardon, ma'am, but Oregon ain't no place for a lady."

The smile became a little severe. "On the contrary. If Oregon is anything like this"—she indicated the camp with a disapproving wave of her hand—"it badly needs the civilizing influence of a woman. I intend to do what I can. But tell me about the Indians."

She had taken a pencil and notebook out of the pocket of her dress and stood now with the pencil poised, her eyes inquiringly on Luke. He looked at McNary, who made a helpless gesture.

Luke said slowly, "Far as I'm concerned, an Injun is just an Injun. Some're bad an' some're worse. Don't trust none of 'em myself."

"You spoke of the Shoshones," she persisted. "Particularly of one named Beaver Head. Tell me about him."

That, he could do. Only he'd sure have to watch his language. "Beaver Head is a Shoshone chief," he declared. "He is also a low-down, lyin' polecat. He's a sneakin', back-bitin' rattlesnake with as much morals as a coyote and as much honor as a starvin' buzzard. If he saw a chance to make a dollar, he'd skin his own grandmother and sell her hide—'

McNary cleared his throat warningly

"Let him talk," Miss Brent said, her pencil flying. She glanced up at Luke and said, "I take it that this Indian has injured you?"

"He shore has! He's ripped the hide off an' then poured sand onto me! When I git my hands on him—'

"In what way did he injure you?"

"Well, we made a trade—"

Miss Brent nodded, murmuring as she wrote "*Typical Shoshone characteristic; shrewdness in trading.*" She smiled encouragingly. "Go on. Just how did he best you in a trade?"

Luke spat bitterly. "Well, five year ago when I bought my squaw from him, he guaranteed—"

The pencil froze. "You bought *what?*"

"A squaw. An' Beaver Head guaranteed her to be sound of wind, limb, an'—"

Miss Brent paled. "Just a moment. You actually bought a *woman* from him?"

"Yeah. His second oldest daughter, Singing Bird. Paid him a right good price too. Gave him five fat ponies, a brand-new red hat, and a musket I hadn't hardly used at all."

"He sold you his own *daughter*?"

McNary, looking worried, broke in. "It's a custom among western tribes. You see—"

"An' I shore got stung," Luke went on hotly, warming to the subject. "Beaver Head gave me his word of honor that she was a good cook, not much to talk, handy at choppin' wood an' takin' care of the horses, an' in first-rate health. Now you'd just ought to see her. After only five years, too."

"You see, there are no white women in the country," McNary said in desperation, "so most of the trappers get their women from the Indian tribes. They treat them well. It's customary for them to give the girl's father a gift, usually horses or something of value."

Miss Brent's lips relaxed a bit, though she still looked shaken. She nodded. "I understand." She fixed Luke with an intent stare. "You married her, of course?"

Luke scowled. "What would I want to do that for?"

"She—she just works for you, then? As a housekeeper?"

"When we got a house, she does."

"What—what else does she do—besides cook, tend house, chop wood, and care for the horses?"

"Well, she makes my clothes. Leastways, she used to."

"And—that's all?"

"Reckon it is."

Miss Brent looked relieved. She murmured as she wrote, "*Custom of white trappers to employ Indian women as cooks and general housekeepers.*" She looked up at Luke. "Would you mind repeating this woman's—er, squaw's—duties?"

Luke did, then added, "She used to help me run my trap lines, too, but she don't no more. She's too busy lookin' after the kids."

Miss Brent dropped her notebook. "You—you have children?" she whispered in horror.

"Only three. One died. It didn't hardly count, nohow. It was a girl."

"I—I feel faint," Miss Brent said to McNary. "May I sit down?"

The clerk assisted her to the chair.

Luke muttered, "Guess the heat got her. She'd ought to go back to Boston, like I told her."

"You'd better run along, Luke," McNary said, scowling up at him. "You've given Miss Brent quite enough information about the Indians for one day."

Luke turned to go. Miss Brent waved away the cup of water which McNary offered her, rose and exclaimed, "Mister Marlow, I see that the white men of the West are as badly in need of civilizing as the Indians. You have sinned deeply at the expense of this poor woman."

"Don't see how you figure that," Luke muttered. "Way I look at it, I got cheated. Beaver Head guaranteed—"

"This woman has borne you four children. All without your union being sanctified by marriage—"

McNary said gently, "The Shoshones have their own marriage ceremony. I'm sure that Luke and Singing Bird are married in the eyes of the Indians."

"Are you?" Miss Brent demanded.

"Well," Luke said uncomfortably, "they had a kind of feast and dance for us. Far as marriage goes, though—"

"We'll make sure there's no doubt about *that*. Go get Singing Bird. I'll perform a Christian ceremony right now."

Luke stared down at the ground. There had been times during the past ten years when he'd sort of yearned

to hear a white woman's voice again. Now he reckoned he hadn't missed a thing.

"I—I don't think I could find her 'fore mornin'," he lied. "She's gone visitin' her relatives."

Miss Brent's lips compressed. "Very well." She turned to McNary. "Give me your word as a Christian and a gentleman that you will make him bring Singing Bird here the first thing tomorrow morning. I'll perform the ceremony then."

McNary coughed, not looking at Luke. "I'll do my best."

With a last piercing look at Luke, Miss Brent said good day, picked up her notebook, and stalked off, leaving the two men regarding each other in uncomfortable silence. Slowly McNary filled and lighted his pipe. He looked up at Luke, his eyes inquiring beneath bushy white eyebrows.

"You'll be here?"

"Hell an' damnation!" Luke exploded. " 'Course I won't!"

"I gave her my word."

"You said you'd do your best. Well, you done it. I ain't a-goin' to marry no daughter of Beaver Head's just to please a lady missionary."

McNary took a thoughtful puff at his pipe, then said gently, "Luke, why not marry her? Singing Bird is your woman, isn't she? She's a good woman—you've often told me that."

Luke looked out across the valley to where the setting sun was turning the rim of the plain to gold, his insides filled with a gnawing misery.

He muttered, "Yeah, she's a good woman. Ain't never seen the beat of her when it comes to work. An' she don't talk much. But I ain't goin' to marry her. I ain't even goin' to live with her any more. Soon as I find Beaver Head, I'm goin' to make him take her back and give me back my five ponies an' my musket an' my red hat."

McNary scowled. "You're going to take her back? Why?"

" 'Cause Beaver Head gave me a royal skinnin' when I bought her, that's why," Luke said stubbornly. "An' I ain't no man to take a skinnin' from an Injun an' like it."

"But you just said that she was a good squaw."

Luke shook his head. He didn't even like to think about it, let alone talk about it, but McNary was a good friend and entitled to know the bitter truth. He'd understand.

"It ain't the way she works. It's—well, it's her teeth. Last winter they just plumb fell out."

McNary chewed on his pipe stem. "That's why you're taking her back?"

"Beaver Head guaranteed her to be in good health," Luke said angrily, "and I took his word for it. Now if I was to sell you a horse and swore it was sound of wind an' limb, then a couple of months later its teeth all fell out, wouldn't you figure I was the consarndest liar on earth? Wouldn't every white man an' Injun that heard about it laugh their fool heads off?"

"We all lose our teeth," McNary said soothingly. "Old age—"

"Damnation! Singing Bird ain't old. She ain't a day over twenty-five. Do you think I'd 'a' paid a young-squaw price for her if she'd been old and ready to fall apart? She ain't half as old as I am. But just like that, her teeth all up and fell out. You'd ought to see her. She looks a holy mess."

"People get sick. That can't be helped."

"Shore. I been sick. But I still got

my teeth, ain't I? No sir, Beaver Head skinned me good and proper. Why, I'll bet that fat old rascal is laughin' fit to kill right now an' braggin' to every Injun this side of the Platte how he took me in a trade." Luke spat. "I ain't goin' to let him get away with *that*. Only way I can keep from bein' made out a fool is to make him take her back an' give me back my five ponies an' my musket an' my red hat."

McNary sat down with a sigh, slowly nodding his head. "I suppose that's all you can do. But Miss Brent won't like it. What shall I tell her in the morning?"

"Tell her I crawled in a hole and died," Luke snorted.

"Aye, I'll tell her," McNary answered, lapsing into the thick Scotch brogue into which he fell when deeply disturbed, "but I dinna think she'll believe me."

Early the next morning Luke moved his brood three miles down the river to the plain where the Shoshones were camped. The reception the Indians gave them was just what he had expected. They laughed. The old women pointed at Singing Bird and cackled like a yard full of hens. The young bucks folded their lips over their teeth in mocking grimaces and rolled on the ground holding their sides in laughter. Even Singing Bird's own sisters smiled and giggled. But the last straw, so far as Luke was concerned, was the way Beaver Head himself sat cross-legged in the sun in front of his lodge, smiling slyly to himself, the musket which Luke had given him balanced across his knees and the red hat, now black with dirt and grease, perched firmly on his head.

Luke hunkered before him, his eyes burning. "Funny, ain't it?" he grunted. "Think you put something over on me, don't you? Well, I come to tell you that I ain't goin' to stand for it. There's yore daughter. Give me back my ponies an' my musket an' my hat."

A look of alarm came into Beaver Head's eyes. "Ponies dead," he muttered.

"No, they ain't. I seen 'em in the herd when we rode up. They're fatter and livelier than they were when I gave 'em to you. I want my musket an' my hat too."

"We make trade five summers ago. Beaver Head satisfied."

"*I* ain't satisfied " Luke said angrily. "Listen, what good is a squaw without teeth? She can't chew buckskin to soften it for moccasins and shirts. She can't eat meat, so all she'll cook is soup. I'm sick an' tired of wearin' moccasins that hurt my feet an' shirts that feel like boards. I've eat so much soup lately that my blood ain't nothin' but water an' broth."

Beaver Head sat lost in thoughtful silence for some time, then grunted, "Beat her."

"Beatin' her won't make her teeth grow."

Beaver Head lapsed into Shoshone and the argument grew heated. Beaver Head said a trade was a trade. Luke said he'd be teetotally damned if it was when one party misrepresented his merchandise. Beaver Head claimed he hadn't misrepresented anything; how was he to know that his daughter's teeth would fall out? That, he concluded, came under the heading of an act of the Great Spirit, and he refused to take the responsibility for it. Besides, women grew old faster than men. Their teeth fell out. Such was the way of life.

Luke reminded him that Singing Bird wasn't an old woman by any stretch of the imagination. He pointed out that he was not an unreasonable man. If Singing Bird's teeth had lasted until she was, say, forty, he wouldn't have made a single complaint, but to fall out at twenty-five—well, he'd leave that up to anybody: that was fifteen years less than he was entitled to.

"No sir, they ain't no two ways about it," he exclaimed. "You got to take her back an' give me my five ponies an' my musket an' my red hat."

"Two ponies," Beaver Head said.

"Five," Luke said firmly.

"Two. She got three sons to feed now."

Luke conceded a point there. "Tell you what I'll do. Take her an' give me four ponies an' the hat. You can keep the musket."

Beaver Head looked at him craftily. Singing Bird, who had been standing a short distance away, eagerly following the dickering, put her hand over her mouth and gazed at Luke with wide, dark eyes. Luke dropped his gaze to the ground. What did she have to look at him that way for? It wasn't his fault her teeth fell out.

"Three ponies," Beaver Head said.

Luke got to his feet, glaring down at the Shoshone. "Four ponies is my last offer," he said angrily. "Take it or leave it. Only I'm warnin' you, if you don't take it, I'm goin' out to the herd an' git my five ponies, jerk that hat off yore head, grab that musket, an' shoot you right between the eyes. I'm plumb sick an' tired of hagglin'."

Beaver Head hastily said that this was no time to lose one's temper and was about to make a more conciliatory offer when two horses came trotting up to the lodge. One bore Chief Clerk McNary, looking very upset and harried; the other carried Miss Emily Brent, prim and stern-looking as she sat the horse in a fashion Luke had never seen before, both of her feet being on the same side. Her scathing eyes made him wish he *had* crawled in a hole last night.

"Mister Marlow, you did not keep your word."

Luke got to his feet and mumbled that he hadn't given her his word, but he was careful to mumble it so low she didn't hear.

She dismounted, looking at Singing Bird and said to McNary, "This is the woman?"

"Aye," McNary answered, avoiding Luke's gaze.

Miss Brent went over and put her arms around the Shoshone woman's shoulders. "You poor dear." She turned and looked at Beaver Head. "And this is her father?"

"Aye."

"Where are the children?"

Singing Bird showed her the youngest, a button-eyed infant of eight months strapped to the carrying-board on her back. Miss Brent asked where the others were and Singing Bird, whom Luke had made the mistake of teaching English, said that she would go get them. A look passed between the two women, a smug, quiet look that told Luke they had reached an unspoken but complete understanding. It gave him a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach, and right then and there he mentally consigned Miss Brent and the Boston mission board to a place where neither was likely to go.

"Now," Miss Brent said, turning to Luke, "I'll deal with you."

"Me?" he said, but it didn't sound near as innocent as he'd intended it to.

"Mister McNary tells me that you not only will not marry this woman, but you're going to desert her."

"No such of a thing. I'm just givin' her back to her father. That is, soon as he gives me my ponies and my musket an'—"

"You took her for your own, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"For five years she has been a good wife to you, hasn't she?"

"Shore, but—"

Miss Brent's eyes were like twin pools of ice. "But *what*, Luke Marlow?"

He felt suddenly as if he had been staked out naked on an anthill in the broiling sun. He could even feel the little insects crawling over his body, pausing here and there to take a savage nip. " 'Tweren't a fair trade," he muttered. "I got cheated."

He guessed later that that hadn't been a very smart thing to say. Because Miss Brent lit in on him then. She raked him up one side and down the other. She told him that women were not cattle to be bought and sold, they were human beings with immortal souls, and the man who treated them as anything less was about the lowest thing that crawled across the face of the earth.

Luke couldn't remember a tenth of what she said, but that tenth was enough to make his ears burn like a pair of pine-knot torches. In his day he'd heard some pretty choice language from ox drivers and muleskinners but he reckoned Miss Brent was the only person this side of St. Louis with a tongue sharp enough to drive a twenty-mule team without using a single cuss word.

When she had finished, he opened his eyes and saw with some surprise that his shirt was still on him; he'd expected it to be scorched clean off.

Miss Brent said in a quieter tone, "Luke, do you believe in the Bible?"

He mumbled he guessed he did.

"Do you know that the man who deserts his wife and children is doomed to eternal torture and damnation?"

"Don't recall readin' that part," he said; then added hastily, "But I'll take your word for it."

"In the face of that, do you still feel equal to deserting the woman?"

Luke didn't answer. Right at the moment, he didn't feel equal to breathing hard.

"And the children," Miss Brent said softly. "What were you going to do with them?"

"Well, Beaver Head said he'd take 'em. I was willin' to let him keep one of the ponies for that."

"Don't you feel any responsibility toward them? Don't you want to see that they're properly schooled and given a Christian upbringing?"

Luke ran a finger around the neck of his shirt, which was galling him something terrible. They were kind of bright little tykes, but he sure couldn't raise them himself. He didn't much like the idea of Beaver Head having them, either. He squinted at Miss Brent.

"Do you want 'em?"

For a moment Miss Brent was very quiet. Then she said, "Children are not to be bartered away either, Luke. They're yours, not mine. When they grow older, perhaps you could send them to me at the mission school. I think your wife would like them to go."

Luke blinked. "My wife?"

"Singing Bird, Luke. You're a good man. At least your heart is good. You're going to marry her."

"Even without teeth?" he protested.

"Just as she is. For better or for worse." Miss Brent smiled. "Perhaps the Lord will see fit to help her."

Luke stared down at his moccasins, the misery in him swelling to a great, deep aching. He didn't reckon the good Lord took enough notice of either him or Singing Bird to grow her a new set of teeth. He wiggled the big toe on his right foot, wincing as the stiff buckskin pinched. Well, maybe he could learn to go barefoot—

"All right. I'll marry her." He looked down at Beaver Head, into whose face had crept a sly secret smile. "But listen you double-blasted old polecat, if I ever hear you braggin'—"

McNary bent toward Miss Brent and whispered something in her ear. She nodded, smiled, and moved a step toward the squatting Indian.

"Beaver Head, you understand English, don't you?"

Swift panic clouded the Shoshone's eyes. He shook his head vigorously. "No speak! No speak!"

"It was wrong of you to sell your daughter, Beaver Head," she said remorselessly. "It was sinful. You must give Luke back the things he gave you. The five ponies, the musket, the—"

A smile of un-Christian joy lighted Luke's face. He said generously, "He can keep the hat."

The ceremony was held in front of the big house at high noon, with all the assembled camp looking on. The Shoshones held the place of honor nearest the store, decked in their brightest garments and paints. Facing them on the opposite side of the narrow lane down which the bride and her father were to come, stood Luke's friends, the mountain men, wearing their most ornately decorated buckskin shirts and beaded leggings. Beyond, stretching far up the slope, milled the myriad Indians of the other tribes—the Blackfeet, the Cheyennes, the Nez Perces, and all the rest.

Embarrassed and ill at ease, Luke stood beneath the awning and waited. As Beaver Head and Singing Bird came toward him, he dropped his eyes to the ground. He felt Singing Bird's hand touch his arm, shy and half fearful. He did not look at her; instead, he stared with glassy eyes at his feet while Miss Brent read the ceremony, mumbling feeble responses when she prompted him. A lot of fuss and feathers over nothing he thought grimly; but as McNary had said no Injun would ever laugh at Singing Bird again teeth or no teeth. For generations to come they would speak in awe of the great ceremony that the white lady missionary had performed in the valley of the Green River before the assembled tribes of fifteen Indian nations.

Miss Brent said, "That's all. Now you may kiss the bride."

"Do I—have to?"

"It's customary."

Well, if he had to, he had to. Might as well do the thing up right this time and make sure he wouldn't have to go through it again. Bracing himself, he turned and looked at Singing Bird. Her eyes were full of a deep, glowing happiness. Then she smiled—a beautiful, gleaming, white-toothed smile.

Luke blinked. He had seen that smile someplace before. Only it hadn't been on Singing Bird's face. He turned and stared at Miss Brent, half expect-

ing to find her miraculously toothless. But, no—Miss Brent still had her teeth and her smile, though both showed a remarkable resemblance to Singing Bird's.

"I brought along an extra set," Miss Brent murmured in a low voice. "The good Lord was kind—they fit. Well, aren't you going to kiss her?"

Luke did. It wasn't so bad, but he sure didn't figure on making a habit of it. Because every time he kissed Singing Bird, he'd feel just like he was kissing Miss Emily Brent.

GOLD-BEARING CHICKENS

DURING one of the later gold rushes in Nevada, Wadsworth, on the Central Pacific Railroad, was the freighting-point for the would-be mining district. East by a little south of Wadsworth, some seventy miles as the broad-tired wagons crawled, was the bedraggled oasis of Sand Springs, set spang in the middle of Twelve Mile Flat. Here, so the story runs, Larry Hunt had an eating-house, featuring beans, biscuit, and coffee, all well flavored with alkali.

The freight traffic prospered—so much so, in fact, that Larry treated himself to the luxury of a crate of pullets, guaranteed to lay. He'd have fresh eggs for himself, by grab! When the chickens were dropped off by an out-bound freighter, though, Larry's urge for some fried chicken got the better of his yen for fried eggs, and he killed two of the precious fowls before they had a chance to cackle once.

When the raw materials had been killed and cleaned, however, Larry forgot all about fried chicken. In the craws of the two unfortunates, he found some fair-sized nuggets. Larry slaughtered the rest of his flock and found more nuggets. This was better than working! Leaving the chickens where they lay, he saddled up and overtook the freighter on the Silver Hill grade.

"Where'd you buy them chickens?" he demanded breathlessly.

The freighter spat reflectively on a hot iron tire and finally remembered that he'd got them from Old Man Hayne in Wadsworth. Larry nodded and burned the breeze. If those chickens had gold in their craws, they must have pecked it off the surface of the ground—trust a farmer not to find gold when he had it right in his own chicken yard!

He spent some time scouting around Old Man Hayne's place just out of Wadsworth, but the more he searched the less it looked like mineral ground. Still, those chickens had gold inside 'em. He looked some more and finally, in desperation, braced the farmer to find out where those chickens of his did range.

Old Man Hayne looked at Larry for a long minute and asked a question himself: "You mean them layin' pullets I sent out by the freighter?"

Larry nodded violently.

"Well, damfino where they did range—I bought 'em off the station agent—out of a carload from Californy."

—ALEC CAMPBELL

HARD RIDING *and mortal danger don't faze Ross Ringler. It takes a pretty woman with a come-hither gleam in her eye to do that. A ZGWM original novelette.*

SADDLE BUM

By George C. Appell

ROSS RINGLER rode slowly up the valley through purple twilight still shot through with the amber haze of sunset, his eyes lifted to the tiny orange squares that marked the home ranch buildings. The gray silhouette of another rider was crossing the valley a mile ahead, pointing for the lights, homebound through the dusk, and Ross wondered for a moment who it might be, then stopped wondering at all. When a man spends his life watching the prairie pass under his stirrups, he loses curiosity fast—unless, of course his interest happens to be caught by the flame-stab of a gun or the lash of a rope, in which case he reacts according to his instincts and training. But buildings, grangers, range hands, bronc peelers, and cooks, corrals, remudas and herds, all begin to look pretty much the same, after a few years.

So Ross lost interest in the gray shape ahead, and put his attention

back to the orange lights. They gave him a pull in the chest, as evening lamps always did; they made him morose sometimes, and then he had to go out and have one drink, two drinks, several drinks. The sweet promise contained in a Christmas carol caused him to do the same thing, and he'd stare wet-eyed into his glass for hours on end, neither seeking company nor wanting it.

Patricia would be up there where the lights were, maybe waiting for him, maybe not. Funny thing about Pat: sometimes she'd look into his eyes as if she was starved for the sight of him and starved for what his soul could offer; and other times, she'd regard him almost defensively, as if trying to decide what devil was housed in his lean, flat-muscled frame. He knew, or he thought he knew, but she was still probing the knowledge.

The moon was a thin silver dime way down the distances, and Ross swung away from the lights on the slope and put his horse straight at the corrals. "Think we had a date yonder?" he asked the animal's ears.

He glanced up at the lights as he passed them and then he saw the other rider at the tie-rail of Oldham's house. He didn't have to wonder any more who it was, and his curiosity was large. It was Fred Kincaid, and Ross could almost smell the soap on him, even from that distance. Kincaid was a-calling.

Ross turned his horse in and snapped something at the chore boy, something about feed and rubbing, though he hadn't meant to be harsh; he knuckled the Mex cook in the ribs and shoved him toward the stove, and although he did those things good-naturedly, it helped his mood to feel the impact of his own flesh on someone else's, even a Mex cook's, and this cook was all hamfat.

"Feed me, Perico, and feed me well." He sat at the plank table and pondered the presence of Fred Kincaid at Patricia Oldham's house.

"Ringler?" It was Tuttle, just come in. Tuttle said, "Same," to Perico and hooked a leg over the bench across from Ross. "Follered yuh up the valley, Ross. How was it?"

Ross lowered a curtain in his mind, and shut out the image of Kincaid a-calling at Oldham's. "We'll have to put more hands on fence, my opinion."

"Tell Oldham?"

"No, he'll have to ask me."

Tuttle was a slat-faced rider who followed his luck for what it was worth, but never seemed to catch up with it. Just another saddle bum, Fred Kincaid had called him, and Ross had snarled him to silence. Why, he didn't know.

"Guess he will," Tuttle grunted. He fished for papers and a sack, an empty look in his eyes. Ross handed over the makings. Tuttle nodded his thanks. "You're sorta scheduled to run the new range, Ross."

"Am I?" There was no secret about it, but a man couldn't admit to everything he knew.

"Oldham likes you." Matchlight burst between them and chased lamp shadows down the planking. Tuttle spouted smoke. "Very much, I hear." There was no rancor in his tone, he was only stating a fact as he saw it. Tuttle's envies were confined to the man who picked up the money after a payday game.

Perico set out fried steaks and fried onions and a bowl of red pepper. Afterward, Ross called for coffee, then retrieved his makings. He smoked while

Tuttle finished his meal, watching the brown-paper cigarette burn toward his fingers, watching the black ring creep toward him along the paper. Like going home, he thought. You started out all afire, and then spent the years walking the backtrail until you were all played out. Then it was over, and it didn't make any difference how you'd started.

Tuttle was fishing his shirt pockets again, and Ross slid the sack at him. "Help yourself."

"Thanks— Hear about Old Man Lanier?"

"Down in the Brazos?"

"Yuh. He's signin' on." Tuttle exhaled thoughtfully. "Why don't yuh go?"

"To Lanier?" Ross shrugged. "What's wrong with here?"

Tuttle leaned forward, face intent. "Kincaid," he whispered. "That kid's sellin' Oldham on everythin' 'cept minin' machinery."

"Is he?" That, too, was something Ross wasn't admitting. It was Oldham's business anyway; if he wanted to bring out a kid expert from Omaha to make improvements on the Y Valley Y, that was his choice and he'd made it.

"Irr'gation's next, Ross. After that, who knows? An' then where are we?"

"Where?"

"Lanier's, 'f we're smart, Ross." Tuttle was pleading. "Lanier don't take to these schoolboy brainstorms. He's a horse feller."

Ross ground the cigarette to pieces between his fingers. He watched the crumbs and shreds spin to the floor.

"S'pose the Bantry Boys hit here, Tuttle? We'd be gone, Oldham'd lose most of his stock, and the brainstorms wouldn't do any good anyway."

"That's Oldham's bad luck."

"Not if I can prevent it."

Ross stood up and took his hat. In his mind he balanced the pulling power of the Bantry Boys against that of Patricia Oldham, and when he came to the correct conclusion he curtained it, as he had curtained Kincaid's image, because he didn't want to recognize it.

Some men are cowards that way.

He walked past the stove, nodded to the cook and went out. At the corrals, he saw the chore boy rubbing down, and his hand found a silver dollar in a leather pocket and he called, "Here, kid." The boy caught the coin and grinned in the moonlight. "Give him a blanket tonight, he's steamed."

"Sure, Ross." The boy didn't say thanks, because he knew he didn't have to.

Ross strolled toward the bunkhouse, and several times he raised his eyes to the lights on the slope. Fred Kincaid's horse was still there, and only two of the lights were on.

He rolled into his blanket and lay for a long time thinking about that, and about what kind of a man would ride his horse to pay court to a girl when all he had to do was walk two hundred yards up a slope. A very unsure young man, Ross judged, or else one who was afraid of something.

The morning sky was still cold when they left the cook shack with coffee-scalded stomachs and the taste of bacon deep in them and tight down. Travers, the old range boss who was running the lower bench country, sent them on their ways, for there was work to be done and few men to do it. Shorty Hanes to the tick troughs to mix and pour, Red Brill to the south valley to cut out stock for the Sunken Ridge range, which was the new one where

they'd been stringing fence all month. Tuttle to the railhead to check cars for the trail drive next month; the chore boy to air blankets and change straw and fish the drains. Ross watched them go; they were good men, all of them, men partial to the grass rope and the double cinch and the oxbow stirrup. Someday, he supposed, the chore boy would be a good man—if he didn't become soft first.

Then Travers turned to him. "Ross, you'd best have another look at Sunken Ridge an' arrange to receive them head from Brill."

"I will, soon's I see Oldham. He's got too much fence up there."

"I think he an' the young felluh've gone up'a'ready."

Ross climbed the slope and arrived at Oldham's house with a thudding heart and a dry mouth. A two-hundred yard climb can do that, occasionally.

Patricia opened the door to him. "Ross?" She was wearing a long dress that day, a dress with a criss-cross pattern and a yellow collar that matched her hair. "Come on in."

He didn't go in. She was regarding him with the side-eyed look that meant she was uncertain of him and uncertain of herself, which further meant—to Ross—that Fred Kincaid had been doing some long talking.

"Pat, is your father here?"

"Oh?" Now she was looking full at him. "He left early with Fred."

"I see." He ran his hat brim through his hands, and his hands were moist.

"It was something to do with tanks, or wind mills." She smiled suddenly, and her eyes were soft on him. "Coffee?"

"Thanks, I had some—below." He faced away from those gray eyes and the fragile lips that he wanted so much. Down by the corrals, Travers was limbering a rope while he guided the boy through chores; Perico was humming a lop-sided tune as he scoured fry pans. Those three people were happy.

"Ross?" She stepped away from the door and came close to him. "I thought you might come up, last night."

He whirled. "With him here?"

"Don't be angry—please."

"I'm not angry." But he was, and he knew it, and that made him feel worse. And he'd let her know that he'd been watching last night; and anger at himself, more than at her, quirted his conscience and left him sullen. He put on his hat. "Well, if Mr. Oldham's not here, I'd better find him."

"Ross, wait." She looked him up and down, as if she'd never seen him before. She cast her eyes across his thick red hair—Bricktop, she'd called him at first, until he'd made her stop it for reasons of his own—and she measured the weather-cured height of him and approved it. "You've been here 'most two seasons, Ross." She swallowed once or twice, hesitating. "Father—Father would like you to do more of his work. Mr. Travers is pretty old."

His impulse was to blurt, "And Mr. Kincaid is pretty young." But he bit back on it; he was acting childish enough as it was. He said, "Two seasons is a long time."

"Not if you unsaddle, ever."

"It's early in the day for riddles, Pat."

"You know what I mean. Ross—don't you want to build anything? Anything besides fences and chutes and—and—pens? Don't you want to plant yourself and say, 'This is where I live'?"

He raised both palms to his hat brim

and pressed it against the crown. He lowered his hands to his hips and braced them there. "What you're really sayin' is, 'Don't you want to make something of yourself'?"

An icy glint flickered across her eyes. "The West is full of men like you—men on horseback with no place to go but on to the next range for another season or two, and then on again, never stopping, never settling, never using what you've got." She paused, fingers curled into her palms. "Ross—you've got a lot. You could—" She put her fists together and held them tight until the knuckles were white.

"A home," Ross murmured.

He could hardly remember his own home, except that it had been north of here and always cold. There were few memories of it, none of them pleasant. A broken wagon spring, and a big, redheaded man cursing foully as he knelt to it. An Indian alarm, and the redheaded man, his father, grumbling that it might be a good thing, that there'd be fewer mouths to feed. But the Indians hadn't come; and then there was the frightful sight of his father crashing a fist into his mother's face . . . There had been a confusion of homes after that, none of them real, exactly, and none of them warm. Some laundresses from the fort had let him sleep in the straw; a granger took him on for chores; a trail boss signed him on as cook; a stockman put him to peeling broncs. Buildings, corrals, shacks, starlight and sunlight, and always the horizon. You could always ride to the horizon, because there'd always be another one beyond it.

"Ross, I'm sorry." Her voice was gentle, not brittle as it had been.

He looked at her vacantly. "Sorry for what?"

"If I hurt you—?"

He set his hat forward and turned into the sun. "I'd better find your father."

The Sunken Ridge range was high ground that swept up to the timber line in swirling escarpments and then flattened off into bays of grass broken only by stands of jack-pine and scrub cedar. A ragged ravine that creased its southeastern edge for two miles gave the place its name, and that's where Ross found Oldham and Fred Kincaid.

The owner of the Y Valley Y sat squat in his saddle, his mustache a narrow white blur against a pink skin that refused to be rutted by the weather. He nodded curtly, after the manner of him, and Ross knew that he was pleased about something. It was when Oldham didn't nod that his hackles were up.

"Morning, Mr. Oldham." Ross kicked free a stirrup and raised his leg and balanced his boot over the pommel.

"Ross," the other acknowledged. "Kincaid and I have been talking about sluicing water down to the lower bench. It'd keep all south valley damp for years to come."

"Uh-huh!" Ross glanced swiftly at Fred Kincaid, then started to flip a cigarette together. He didn't pass the makings because Kincaid smoked factory tubes and Oldham chewed cigars. "I suggest you put more men on fence, before you do that," he said through smoke. "'Til the drive to the railhead, anyways."

"Why?" Fred Kincaid demanded. He was small-set and had a bright young skin and eager eyes. The store-bought buckskin shirt he'd picked up in Omaha was still clean and unpatched. His black-and-white checkered neckerchief flapped slightly in the cool breeze of

the high places. "First things first, I say."

"My point," Ross told him dryly. "The Bantry Boys aren't after water."

Kincaid snorted and spat. "Bantrys!"

"I s'pose you think they're up in St. Louis in a stage show?"

Oldham smiled thinly. "They hit the Flyin' M two months ago, and it's possible they might hit us."

"Not if we hunt 'em down—move into 'em," Fred Kincaid proposed. "We could make up a posse."

Oldham's frown reflected his flabby confidence in the suggestion. "Later, we may, if we ever get evidence. Right now, we'll concentrate on sluicin'."

Ross crushed out his smoke and dropped it. "Red Brill's herdin' this way soon, after Shorty Hanes gets his de-tickin' done. We'll need hands along this new fencin', Mr. Oldham, and we'll need 'em until the drive starts."

"You believe that, Ross?"

Ross fixed chip-hard eyes on the owner. "New grazin' attracts flies. It always has. Once the stock's at the railhead, we can all go home and play poker. But—"

"All right, all right. It's your range, Ross—if you want it." Oldham was smiling again.

Kincaid laid a cigarette between his lips and struck a match. The breeze fanned it out, and he cupped his gloves and struck another. That went out too. On the third try, he made smoke.

Oldham sniffed. "Fred, you better stay on the fences here. We'll pack some gear out to you."

"Me?" Kincaid switched his eyes from one to the other. "I thought I came here to straighten out operations."

"Your daddy," Oldham said wearily, "wants you to learn the cattle business, despite what you learned in school. This'll be good training for you." He circled his horse on the forehand and nodded. "I'm going down."

Fred Kincaid inhaled and exhaled, and the smoke dipped away on the wind. "Mr. Oldham—I hope this won't be permanent."

"That depends on you." Oldham hitched his weight around and called over his shoulder, "Ross, see if Tuttle's back from the railhead, and if he is, let me know about the loading. I'll be on the lower bench."

"Right."

"You can bring Fred's gear with yours, when you come back."

They watched him drop into the timber, winding his way off the grasslands onto the descending ridges. Then he was gone from sight, and the two were alone on the crest of Sunken Ridge.

Ross said, "There're only four Bantrys, Kincaid, but there's forty miles of new fencing hereabouts. I suggest that—"

"I don't give a damn what you suggest!"

"Slowly, boy, slowly." Ross saw the blood spring into Kincaid's skin and throb at his temples.

"Neat, wasn't it?" Kincaid was leaning forward, and Ross noticed for the first time how thick his shoulders were. "Me out here—you in there—where she is!"

Ross started to smile. "Kincaid, I'm the clumsiest man with sweet talk I ever knew. From the looks of things, you're doin' better."

"I'm better with this, too!" He bent his arm, jerked his hand, and snagged out a .44 and held it on his thigh, muzzle pointed at Ross's stomach.

"Steady, boy." Ross folded his arms and lifted his boot off the pommel and

found the free stirrup. "You're too young to fill a shallow grave."

"Go on—draw! I'll give you even time."

In that moment, Ross almost liked him. There is something about a young man that amuses an older one even when the young one chooses to be dangerous. Older men laugh inside themselves, though they may not permit it to rise to their lips, for youth cannot be offended.

"Kincaid," Ross said solemnly, "don't ever throw down on a man unless you can do it in less than one second. I think you required about three, just then."

Fred Kincaid lowered his eyes to the .44. "Well—if you don't want to shoot it out—"

This time, Ross laughed. "What's there to shoot out?" He had to play backward now, rolling with the punches, because an embarrassed man is still a dangerous man.

Kincaid looked up, eyes burning. "My guess about Pat was wrong, maybe. But"—he held the .44 higher—"what's your real name?"

Irritation sparked through Ross Ringler; personal questions were not to his taste, and besides, he had work to do. "It happens to be the one you know." He unfolded his arms and gathered rein. "Why?"

"Well, since I'm here to improve operations, we might as well settle this right now: your name wouldn't be Bantry—would it?"

"Bantry?" Ross scarcely heard his own voice echo the word, so loud was the pounding in his ears. His mouth was sand-dry and a ring of fire was searing his skull.

"Yes, Bantry." Fred Kincaid hunched lower. "Isn't that a rustler's tactic—to plant one of his own men with an outfit to help from the inside?"

Rage howled through Ross Ringler and took hold of his muscles and shook them. It blinded his eyes and deafened his ears and left him quivering and sweat-wet and breathless. He fought it, reined it, brought it down, and, finally, rode it. "You bone-headed—" He couldn't think of what to call him, and gasped "puppy," lamely.

Fred Kincaid's face was blank with surprise. Abruptly, he holstered the gun.

"Maybe it isn't Bantry, then." He wrenched rein and turned sideways, still glaring. "I said 'maybe', though."

Ross relaxed from anger-stiffness to slow motions. He forced himself to find sack and papers; he commanded himself to put a cigarette together—carefully, without spilling tobacco. He licked it, stuck it in his mouth, snapped a match, and lighted it.

"All right, Kincaid. Stay near the ravine here, and I'll bring your gear to you."

He trotted down toward the timber without once looking back.

Tuttle hadn't returned from the railhead, which was no surprise to Ross, as the railhead was a double-day's ride from the valley and back. It wouldn't be any surprise to Oldham, either, when he came up from the lower bench and left Red Brill to start herding that afternoon.

Ross swopped-off his own horse for a claybank that had more hide to it and could pack more weight, his intention being to remain on Sunken Ridge until the drive started. It would take three weeks to finish grazing-up the herd on new lands, and three weeks requires plenty of flour, bacon, and cof-

fee, if the time is to be spent in high country.

Perico was closing a flour tin when something caught his eye and he beamed fatly and bowed. "There she go. *Muy linda.*"

Ross wheeled away from the claybank and saw Pat cantering past, and suddenly she turned and saw him and started swinging around off the slope. She brought her pony to a skidding stop, and Ross shook his head.

"Always bring 'em in dry, Pat."

"I'm not in yet." She was wearing faded denims and a tight blouse and a bandana that was knotted just forward of her ear.

"You look like a pirate's lady," Ross told her.

"Maybe I am." She swung off and eyed the claybank. "What are you doing?"

"Well, I'm about to fashion a diamond hitch."

"Spanish is better."

Ross laced rope through a loop. "Not for a high-boned horse."

"Leaving?" She said it quickly, all in one breath.

"I'm going up in the world." Ross slung the hitch and hauled on it.

Pat's puzzlement showed on her face; the tiny scatter of freckles on her nose bunched together, the way Ross liked to see it. "Well, you might say good-by. I didn't think you'd speak to me. You didn't even notice me."

"Perico did." He lashed line and stood back. "Hey—the flour!" he took the tin and whacked the lid a few times to make sure ,it was closed.

"Ross, what's this about?"

"I'm going up to Sunken Ridge for a few days and watch some steers get fat." Casually, he added, "Kincaid'll be with me."

Perico waddled toward the cook shack, and Pat waited until he was inside. "Do you have to go, Ross?"

"If I don't, Red Brill's goin' to be surprised when he runs the herd up there and—" he took a breath—"finds only Freddie."

"Don't say that—not that way."

"What's wrong with it?" He grinned at recollection of Fred Kincaid. "Fred's a good man. Tries to be, anyways."

"No harm in trying, is there?" She'd been seekful a moment before, but now she was getting brittle.

Ross got the tin secured and hit it again. "Nope, there isn't."

Their faces were six inches apart. "You're not coming back, are you, Ross?"

"I'd planned to." Resentment at her questions made him blurt the words.

"You are a pirate, aren't you?" She was challenging him, daring him, trying to end her own uncertainty of him. "You'll never unsaddle, will you?" Quietly, she said, "You're afraid."

It was true, and he knew it, and it hurt him to have to recognize it. But it was there, an imp teasing his conscience, and he'd never get rid of it until he left the Y Valley Y in his tracks, and Patricia Oldham with it. He'd stumbled so often before, had Ross Ringler, that he was afraid to chance it again. He knew that he couldn't take Pat, who wanted to be taken, because there were too many images between them that only he could see. They were deep in him and had become a part of him, like the sight of evening lamps or the sound of a hymn or a carol.

And there were other things that he couldn't wash from his memory, try as he would; things that had soaked into his soul and stained it forever. The

girl in Sonora, lace-clad and laughing, who brought wine to his bed and drank with the shoulder tension of a mountain cat; whose green eyes were savage for him, and whose flashing nails held the shadow of claws. And the girl in St. Louis, whom he'd loved a little but not much, and who years afterward was knifed by a man named Bantry and left to die, writhing, on a back room's rancid floormat.

There were all those things that were in the grain of him, in the weave of him, and that were there for all time. He'd stumbled before, he'd stumble again, but it couldn't be here.

"You're afraid," she repeated.

He nodded shortly. "Damnedest thing—" Afraid of hurting the girl whose father had sent him to see her that very morning, and with the weakest of excuses. "I'd better pack out, Pat."

He whipped a leg over the claybank and touched his hat brim.

"Ross!—Ross, wait!"

He put his heaviness into one stirrup, leaning low to her. "Pat, at last I think I know myself. You don't, but if you ever do, you won't like what you find."

"Ross!" The wall-edge of seekfulness sank from her voice and anger flared from her eyes. "You're a coward!"

"I reckon so." He tapped spurs sharply. "I don't like old pictures, but I do like old ways."

Red Brill had the herd on Sunken Ridge by the time Ross got there. The sunset sky was an immense whelm of yellow, and westward the blood smear of the dying sun topped the long, purple horizon.

"Four hundred," Brill announced. "Shorty's keepin' the rest below 'til he gits 'em on-ticked."

"See Oldham?"

"Yeah—he's figgerin' where to put tanks. What they gonna smoke up next?"

"Flyin' cattle cars."

Brill pointed toward the ravine. "That your partner?"

"'Til Tuttle comes out."

"I'm snorin' here tonight, but I gotta git below agin tomorra an' help Shorty."

Fred Kincaid had pin-grazed his horse, and was sitting cross-legged behind some scrub to keep the wind off him. He got up when he saw Ross, but he didn't come forward.

"Take your gear," Ross told him.

Brill watched his drive bunch for the night, then started digging a pit by the scrub. He kindled it, squatted over it; and presently a fire bloomed.

They sat under the star crust, alert to the sounds of the restless herd, not speaking much. Kincaid never spoke at all.

Then Brill set out the stuff he'd been frying, and waved a hand. "Fly at it, if yore stomachs can hold it."

The fire was a small circle of crumbling coals in the pit bottom when Ross told Kincaid to roll in. "Brill and me'll take watches. You'll start ridin' in the morning to see this herd doesn't bust out. Tonight, it's bunched, but it won't be for long." He spoke slowly, deliberately, like a teacher to a tot.

Kincaid didn't answer, but he did find his blankets, and stretched out behind the scrub.

The early evening passed over to dark night, and Ross and Brill sat smoking until the moon rose silver-white and rinsed the skies to pale blue. Once, Brill walked away and busied

himself with the fringes of the herd; another time, he stood up and tilted his head, listening.

"What?"

Brill tossed a palm. "Nervous, I giss."

"Too bright for 'em to hit tonight." Ross hoped that he was speaking the truth, but he wasn't.

They hit, though not hard.

The herd started milling and moaning, and Brill was on his feet in an instant. Ross stepped past Kincaid's sleeping form, heart quick in his chest, sensing the threat.

"See anything, Brill?"

"No, but don't let 'em see you. They musta missed the fire, pitted thataway."

They crouched by the pickets, each trying to judge how the Bantrys would pull this one. On fence jobs, they'd been known to cut the wire and ease the herd through in small bunches; and on other jobs, they'd come in fast and stampeded.

A lumpy shape, saddle-high, moved across the eastern grayness, urging the swinging herd toward the ravine. Another shape appeared behind it and stopped and sat motionless.

"Other two must be cuttin' wire west of the ravine. Go on down, Brill, and interfere."

Then Fred Kincaid came awake and sprang to his feet. "What're you up to?"

"Quiet, Kincaid. We don't shout."

"No?" He had his .44 in the open.

Ross spoke through his side-teeth: "Get down. Get off the sky line. Get low. Don't you know anythin'?"

After a moment, Kincaid bent double and started creeping toward the moving herd.

"Come back, Kincaid."

He half-turned, grinning. "Way to break up this is to move right in."

"Wait'll they're on the run. You can hardly see your target with the herd in the way. Come back."

"Go to hell." Kincaid crept east along the rim of the ravine and was gone.

Ross let him go. He had his own problems, and he proceeded to solve them. He crawled past the dead pit fire and past the scrub and reached the ravine near its center. He listened to the breeze, hoping for a sound from Brill, but all he heard was the muted grumble of hoofs filling the east. And then he knew he'd figured it right, and he pulled his gun and rested the muzzle on his forearm and lay there waiting.

The milky moon-wash made things hazy; across the ravine he could see the glistening new fencing, and in the crease itself he made out broken rock. The Bantry Boys would have to work cautiously through that stuff, though their plan was good: slip the herd down the ravine, covered, and rush it through cut wire where the range ended, westward.

They started coming in from the east; the smoky night-haze showed their horns and reflected in the moist jewels of their eyes. They were shuffling, lining out, coming together, bumping. A rider was leading them, twisting off his saddle to take them through the rocks.

Ross cocked his gun and trusted that the hammer-snick hadn't been heard.

The flat smack of a shot punched the eastern night and a man cursed and the leading rider threw himself forward and put his horse through the ravine at a crazy gallop.

"Kincaid, dog courage is not for men." He'd fired too soon and tipped his hand, but you can't take back a bullet. The thing was done and here came Ryerson Bantry flying past with

a yell on his face and the herd wild behind him.

Ross took a breath and aimed a foot in front of that face and fired. Ryerson Bantry rose off the saddle and flung up his arms and dropped into the rocks. He was crabbing around, convulsing to the last impulses of life, when the herd struck him and chopped him to bone-pulp and flooded the ravine and swept on like tidal surf.

The crick-crack of shots sounded from the west end: Brill, interfering. Ross ran back to the picket to catch up his horse when he saw a single rider pounding toward the timber; and he saw Kincaid way behind, shooting blindly. Ross cocked, balanced, aimed and fired. The rider flopped off and hit stone with the sound of a kicked cigar box and never moved another muscle. Kincaid came up shouting and fired two shots into the body and pulled down.

Ross rode bareback down the west slope and found Red Brill waving his arms and singing curses and dancing back and forth behind the huddled shapes of three dead steers. The herd was turning and circling and colliding; hoofs echoed like kettle drums in the approach of the ravine and horns clicked and caught; but none were coming out.

"Hadda stretch three to halt 'em, Ross."

Ross threw off and watched Red Brill work. He needed no help now, the 'horns were clear of the fencing. "They get it cut, Red?"

"Naw, not complete. One got away an' th'other one died. He's yonder."

Fred Kincaid splashed sand on them with a side-reined stop and jumped down and addressed Ross with his .44. "Where were you, Ringler?"

"Why, hullo, Freddie. Stick that hogleg back in your shirt, boy."

"Reach for yours!"

Red Brill opened his mouth and closed it and opened it again. "What itches him?"

Ross spat. He was feeling slightly sick inside; uncompleted work was not to his taste, and a Bantry was loose on the south ranges somewhere. Maybe they'd meet at Lanier's, maybe not.

"He thinks I'm a plant." Then Ross snaked out an arm and had Kincaid's .44 in his hand, muzzle out. He snapped open the chamber and spun it. "Empty, boy. Shouldn't fire blind, ever." He handed over the gun. "You've got the sand, all right, and all you need is the sense— You camp here, Red. I better see Oldham."

"So had I," Fred Kincaid whispered.

Ross mounted and booted a foam-frilled flank. "I got to pick up my own horse, for one thing, soon's I saddle this claybank."

They met Oldham below the timber, just after dawn. "I heard the racket, Ross." He didn't nod.

"Bantrys. Three down, one away."

"The herd?"

"Same soore—three down. Brill had to stop 'em that way. Rest are all right."

Oldham nodded. "Thanks, Ross."

"Thank Kincaid, here. I kind of got lost in the rush."

Oldham eyed Fred Kincaid strangely. "What did you do?"

"Kept shooting till they all were down. Moved right in."

Ross jerked a thumb. "Emptied his gun. He's learnin'. By the way, Mr. Oldham, give someone else the Sunken Ridge."

"Why?"

"I'm goin' on. Got a better offer south."

Oldham was suspicious. "I'll double it."

"Nope, I got to move. 'Sides, one of the Bantrys is still loose. Come on, Kincaid, you got news to report."

Ross was rolling an oilskin in the bunkhouse when Kincaid came in. It was not a welcome interruption, because Ross wanted to get riding as soon as possible, before the other hands came in. Too, he wanted space behind him before Pat appeared and leveled those accusing eyes on him. He could never tell her that a man who searches the horizon all the time is certain to keep stumbling, and that whoever is with him will surely stumble too. He couldn't tell her those things, any more than she could understand or accept them.

Kincaid's voice was hoarse. "All right, Ringler."

Ross finished rolling the oilskin before he turned. "What's all right?"

"Playin' the hero, huh? "Better offer south'!" Fred Kincaid worked his fingers in and out, eagerly. "Know a lot about rustling, don't you?"

"It hasn't much future in it."

Kincaid put his chin down. "I haven't any proof, but I can still add up what I think."

"Proof?"

"You faded fast, there, while I was putting the whole gang in my holster."

A warning wire glowed in Ross's brain; Kincaid wanted to be dangerous, he wanted knuckles now, not bullets. He'd look a sad sight for Pat, though, with his young face all bashed to pieces. A woman wants her man to be a whole hero, nothing less.

"Cock 'em, Ringler." Fred had a stance, one thick shoulder forward, one foot back. His fists bulged big.

"You sure, boy?"

Kincaid's grimace was triumphant. "I'm sure of this!" He lunged out and hit Ross on the throat and jarred his jaws. He waded forward, chin in shoulder.

Ross footed backward, arms limp at his sides, feeling fury sear his very being. Rageful imps were needling him, goading him, reminding him of the wide chasm between himself and all the people who had homes and could unsaddle and light the evening lamps.

Kincaid smashed a heavy right at Ross's mouth and missed. Ross ducked in and leaned into Kincaid's ribs and dodged out, leaving a bruise.

Then Kincaid was battering with both fists and Ross beat them down and fell sideward and lashed under them. He hooked a flash-punch into Kincaid's face and saw blood come; and Kincaid was on him, ramming his ribs with drubbing knuckles, rocking his head with pistonlike punches.

Ross pranced back, bumped into a bunk and slipped, turning, into the open. He tasted salt and blew out his breath and saw red and yellow bubbles, and suddenly something exploded in his head. He hammered in, swinging hard, driving his fists into Kincaid's stomach and short ribs and breastbone. He threw a cross off a short heel and felt it crack bone, and followed up with a counter-cross and saw Kincaid reel against the wall.

Then he slung himself on him, pistoning the bright-skinned face with pile-driver punches that split an eye socket, roweled a cheek, crushed nostrils, splintered teeth, and tattered lip cartilage. Kincaid buckled, sagged, and

slumped forward, and Ross caught him and heaved him straight and backed him against the wall and barraged that broken face with hateful knuckles that he couldn't stop.

A scream sounded, and hands were pulling at him, fingers were biting into his neck, his triceps, his shoulders. He wrenched them off, and slim arms locked around his throat and a light weight was dragging at him and he stopped punching, finally, and let Fred Kincaid collapse on the floor.

"Ross!" Patricia Oldham was staring at him with revulsion flinting from those gray eyes. She knew, in the instant, what devil inhabited his soul; and she stood away from him, disgust arching her lips.

He wiped his face and swung his stinging jaws drunkenly and reached for the oilskin. He stepped deliberately between her and Kincaid's bleeding inertness.

"Found it, didn't you? And you don't like it, either." He shouldered the roll and walked out.

Minutes later, he was riding slowly down the south ranges, pointing for Old Man Lanier's and the Brazos country, which was a lot nearer Sonora than the Y Valley Y. And in Sonora was a green-eyed girl with flashing nails that held the shadow of claws, and she'd bring wine to his bed and sing softly for him, and he'd take a drink, two drinks, several of them—What had he told the chore boy back at the Y Valley Y? "*Don't ever get soft, kid. And tell Tuttle where I am.*"

He rode on, whistling a tune from a range now forgotten; he'd lowered a curtain across his mind, shutting out the images of things he couldn't take. Some men are cowards that way. Ahead was the horizon, and he trotted easily toward it, stirrups brushing the grass tops as he passed.

CRAZY OVER HORSES

ONE OF THE NEATEST DODGES ever perpetrated by horse thieves in the Old West had its beginning in Lewiston, Idaho Territory. By the early '60s, Lewiston had become the meeting-place for miners, adventurers, and prospectors who made their livings from the rich diggings of the Northwest. Newcomers to the area habitually paused at Lewiston a few days to rest their animals and find out where the best claims were located. During this brief period of leisure the unsuspecting travelers became the object of a discreet but thorough investigation by members of a local gang of thieves. When valuable animals, expensive saddles, or fine equipment were noticed by these criminals, they quietly forged detailed bills of sale covering the property in question. As soon as the visitors had decided upon a route of departure, these bills of sale were dispatched by special messenger to the keeper of one of several roadhouses which bordered the routes in and out of the settlement. Later the unwary travelers took their leave, only to be halted a few miles from town by a seemingly irate innkeeper who accused them of having sold the property to him and then stolen it back. The forged bill of sale was then produced to substantiate the innkeeper's claim.

It may be said that under the circumstances only the most foolhardy traveler dared attempt to argue—and each roadhouse had a small private cemetery out back into which were deposited the remains of the valiant few who voiced objection to being thus relieved of their possessions.

—GENE HAMMOND

Free - for - All

ZANE GREY used Arizona's Tonto Basin as the "setting" for several of his incomparable romances of the Old West. This he did in the case of "Nevada", the novel abridged in this issue of ZGWM, and, as was his custom, he wrote a story filled with the physical beauty as well as the violence and the flaming action of America's frontier.

● George C. Appel's novelette, "Saddle Bum," features a character who, although strong and self-reliant, is bedeviled by an unfortunately unsavory past. Ross Ringler, we rather hope, may turn up again in further ZGWM adventures. No signs of such so far—but we're keeping our fingers crossed.

● We pass along to you the note which author John E. Kelly sent us when he submitted his dramatic story, "The Sheriff and the Slavers," in manuscript form: "The theme of this tale is an almost unknown facet of Californian history. Although California was admitted to the Union as a 'free state' in 1850, some of the newly arrived Americans instituted Indian slavery, which was officially countenanced until at least 1863 and unofficially thereafter in remote areas. In the Humboldt County courthouse at Eureka are preserved over 100 Indian 'indenture papers,' enslaving individual aborigines, dating from 1860." We like the historical reference, which gives the yarn as solid a basis as had John's recent novelette, "Oil at Mattole River."

● "Fair Trade," by Bill Gulick, is sure to set readers a-chuckling. As to *its* historical basis—well, Bill writes: "Though I've never run across a case of such an incident as I've used actually happening, I imagine something similar *could* have happened, as the early missionaries to the Oregon country were quite often shocked at the casual way the mountain men acquired Indian squaws without benefit of clergy." A pretty speculative "source," certainly—but a downright entertaining yarn!

● When W. H. Hutchinson submitted "Long Rider Laureate," the story of fabulous badman Tiburcio Vasquez, he allowed it was his most effective bit of fact writing. Well, recalling such pieces as "When the Ridgepole Spoke," "The Secret of Sun Peak," "Bible, Buck skins, and "Beaver," etc., we dunno. How about it, readers? Best letter on the subject takes a five-dollar check!

—THE EDITORS

Make sure of your Zane Grey magazine every month

Send your subscription in now for twelve issues of this magnificent book, which includes short stories, features, and magazine abridgments of Zane Grey novels,

ALL FOR

26/-

POST FREE

WORLD DISTRIBUTORS (MANCHESTER) LIMITED
14A LEVER STREET
MANCHESTER

Gentlemen,

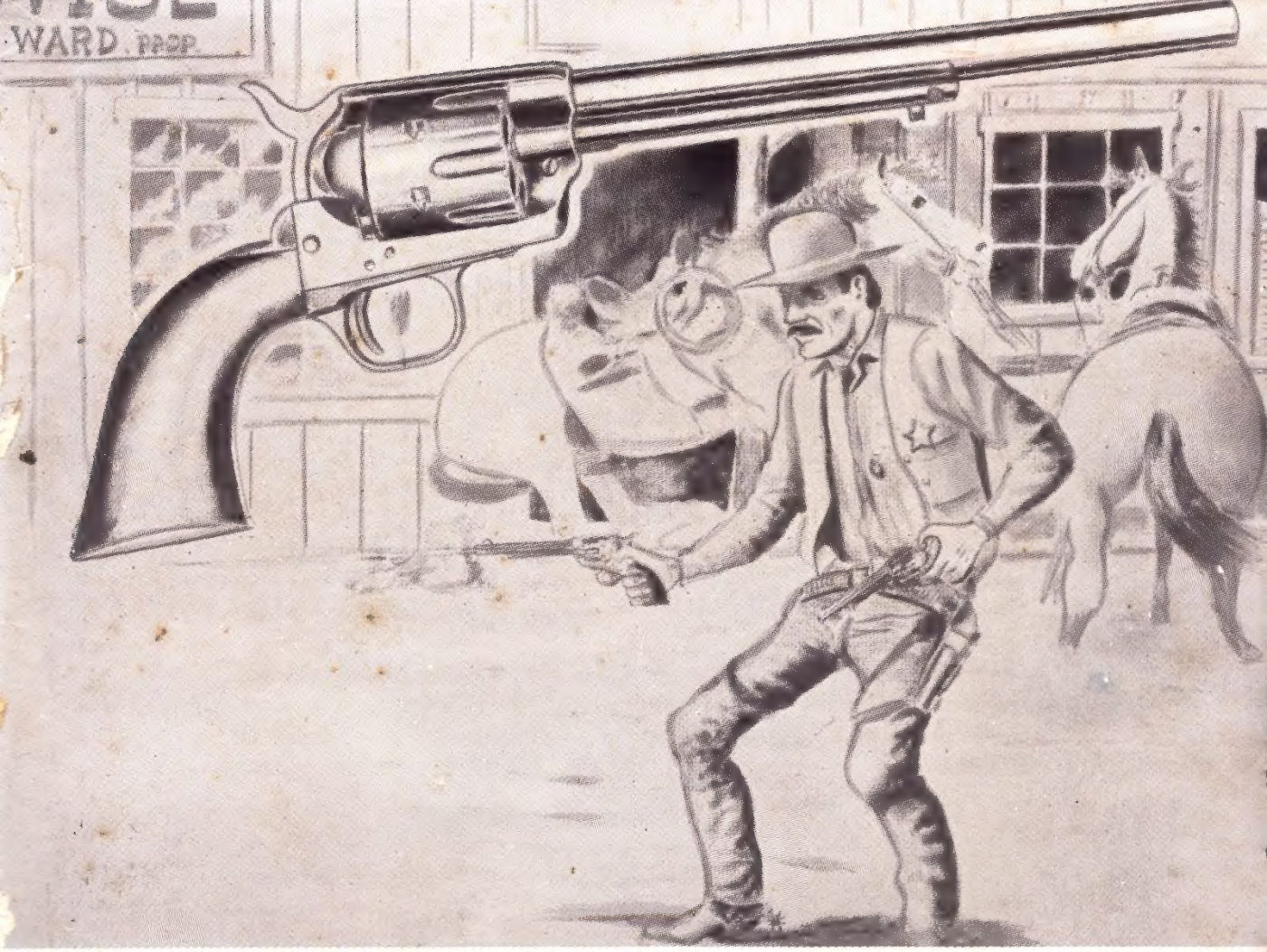
Please send me the next twelve issues of ZANE GREY WESTERN

NAME.....

ADDRESS .....

TOWN..... COUNTY.....

If you have not read previous issues of this magazine and you require them, please send 2/- for each copy required, and they will be sent to you post free.



THE COLT PEACEMAKER

No single person or thing is more closely associated with the romance and adventure of the American West than is the Colt "Peacemaker". Introduced in 1873, it was the first large revolver to use the new self-exploding ammunition. The Peacemaker had a six-shot cylinder chambered for a .45-caliber center-fire bullet, and was made with three different barrel lengths. The "cavalry model" (after several years of field trials the Peacemaker was adopted by the army) had a seven-and-a-half-inch barrel; the "artillery model" a five-and-a-half-inch barrel; and the one with a four-and-three-quarter-inch barrel became the "civilian model".

The .44-caliber revolver on the same frame was called the "Frontier Model" and was also available in different barrel lengths. Both these single-action guns were manufactured until World War II, when other production demands resulted in Colt's decision to discontinue them. Hand-gun enthusiasts generally mourn their passing, for most of us agree that there will never be a double-action gun to match their perfection of weight and balance.

Randy Steffen

In This Issue

"NEVADA" *by Zane Grey*

This is one of Zane Grey's finest and most appealing stories featuring Jim Lacy, an ex outlaw, a gunhawk extraordinary with the hard-won, but unpalatable identity of "Nevada" who settles in Limeville hoping to nest and live down his past life. Unfortunately, a series of incidents frustrate his plan, and when the ranch of Ben Isle, a former partner, is threatened with ruin from the unceasing raids of rangeland thieves, a rider known as "Texas Jack" proves with roaring guns that names are of little importance in the rough-hewn arena of Western Life.

SADDLE BUM *by George C. Appell*

Hard riding and mortal danger don't faze Ross Ringler. It takes a pretty woman with a come-hither gleam in her eye to do that.

THE SHERIFF AND THE SLAVERS
by John E. Kelly

Trampas County's head lawman shucks his shield so he can tangle with a touchy "federal question"—and enforces a few state laws in the bargain.

LONG RIDER LAUREATE *by W. H. Hutchinson*

Tiburcio Vasquez, last of the great California road agents, had a career as long as it was gamey. This account of his lusty exploits was written especially for ZGWM

—plus many more thrilling features and stories of the West of yesterday.

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE ★ No. 8

WDL

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

No. 8

The Zane Grey Novel

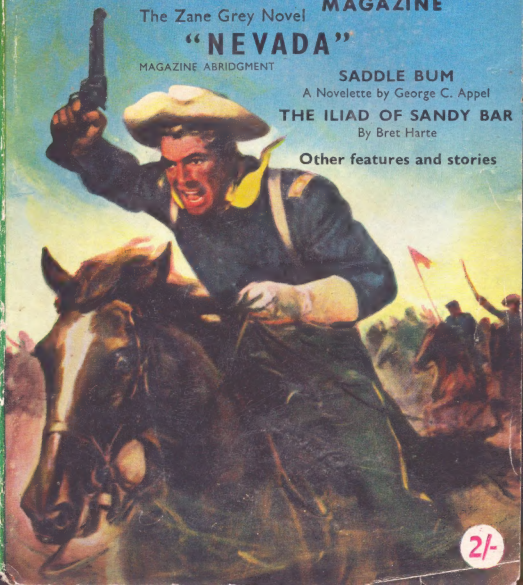
"NEVADA"

MAGAZINE ABRIDGMENT

SADDLE BUM
A Novelette by George C. Appel

THE ILIAD OF SANDY BAR
By Bret Harte

Other features and stories



2/-